

# WILD WEST WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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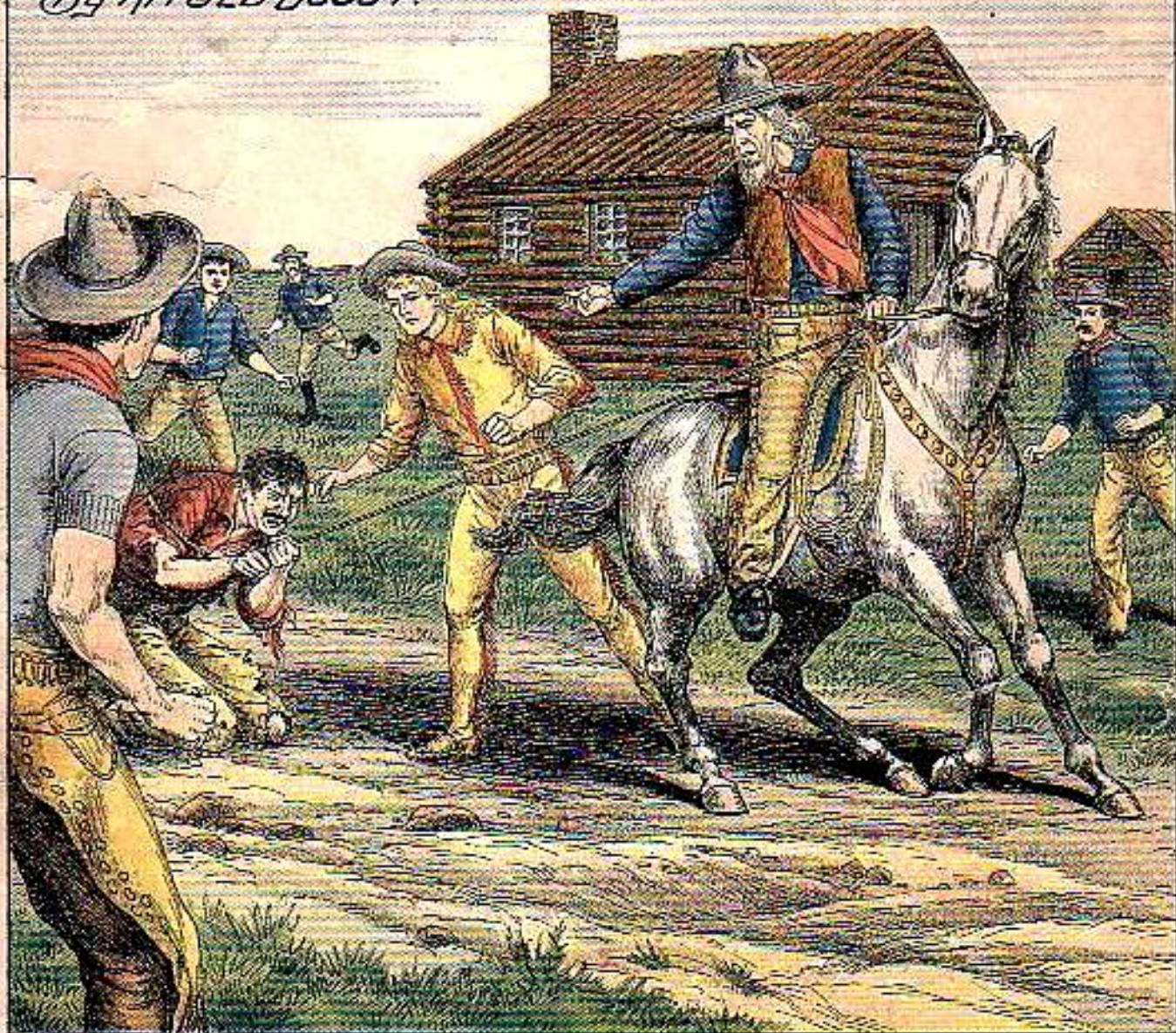
No. 271.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 27, 1907.

Price 5 Cents.

## YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE COWBOY TRAILER; OR, THE RANCHMAN'S REVENGE.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



"There he is!" exclaimed the ranchman, pointing to the wretch he had dragged over the prairie until his clothing was literally in rags. "I swore I'd git him, an' I did."  
Young Wild West saw that he had caught the right man.



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## YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE COWBOY TRAILER

OR,

### The Ranchman's Revenge

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE STAMPEDE IN THE GULLEY.

"I reckon we've got ter be movin' a little lively, Wild."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit, Charlie. I wonder what could have started that herd of cattle, anyhow? They are less than a mile away, and coming like sixty. We'll make for higher ground and let them go on through."

Young Wild West and his two partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, together with the girls, as Cheyenne Charlie's wife and the sweethearts of the two boys were always called by them, were riding through a narrow grass strip in the extreme northwestern part of Texas.

The strip was hemmed in on either side by a rugged slope that was almost too steep to get up with horses.

A shallow stream of water flowed through the hollow, which was really the termination of a ravine that started back in the mountains.

It was along this stream that the well-known boy hero and Champion Deadshot of the West was riding with his friends when they suddenly heard the sounds made by the hoofs of many cattle.

The sounds came from the direction in which they were heading, which showed that a cattle range could not be very far away, and that a herd of cattle had been stampeded.

As Cheyenne Charlie, the famous scout and Indian fighter, caught sight of the herd he spoke the words at the opening of our story.

Young Wild West had seen the cattle at about the same time, and he figured that there were hundreds in it.

No wonder, then, that he proposed to make for higher ground and let them go on.

The two Chinese servants belonging to the party no

sooner saw the cattle coming through the narrow valley than they uttered frightened cries and turned to ride up the slope.

"Not here!" shouted Young Wild West to them. "You can't get the pack horses up there. Ride on a couple of hundred yards. We have got time enough."

The boy spoke as coolly as though there was little or no danger. But that was Young Wild West's style.

He never lost his head, no matter what he was up against, and his wonderful coolness and good judgment had carried him through many dangerous and thrilling situations.

Being recognized Champion Deadshot of the West, he, of course, never missed when he pulled a trigger. But this was partly due to the fact that he never pulled a trigger unless he was certain that he had his target covered.

The party had come to an abrupt halt, and charming Arietta Murdock, the blonde sweetheart of Young Wild West, rode up to his side and said:

"We haven't got any time to waste, Wild."

"I know it, Et," was the cool reply. "But I want to get the Chinamen on the right track first. We can't afford to lose our camping outfit, you know."

The boy took another look at the rapidly approaching cattle and saw that they were bearing up the hollow, spread clear across it.

He could see some of them stumble and fall into the brook, but this did not check the rush, and on they came.

Our hero had noticed that the gully had been gradually widening as they rode down it, and where the cattle now were it was perhaps two hundred yards in width.

But six hundred feet is not much room for a thousand or more cattle madly plunging forward to escape from some real or imaginary danger.



Where our friends had halted it was less than a hundred yards in width, so that meant that there was going to be a jam in the mass of cattle, and that many would go down, allowing the survivors to go on.

As soon as he saw the two Chinamen dashing away, with the pack horses at a gallop behind them, Young Wild West called out:

"Light out, everybody! The cattle are not more than a quarter of a mile away. It is lucky for us that the gully is so straight, or we should not have been able to see them so far away."

Away rode the six after the Celestials, who were urging their own steeds and the pack horses to do their best, no doubt fully believing that unless they got to a place where they could ride out of the shallow strip they would be ground to powder under the hoofs of the advancing cattle.

If they remained in their path they certainly would be; but no human lives need be lost, since it would be easy for any of them to climb the ascent on either side and escape the danger.

But Young Wild West did not propose to lose a horse, or any part of their outfit.

"There you are, Hop!" he called out, when they had covered a couple of hundred yards. "To your left! Up the hill with the pair of you! But look out the horses don't stumble! Take it easy, for you've got lots of time."

The Chinamen heard and understood.

Without looking around, they turned and rode up a crooked sort of natural path to a wide ledge twenty feet above.

"Go on up, girls," said the dashing young deadshot, as he slowed down until he was the last on. "There! I reckon we're all right now."

It was a grand, not to say, thrilling, sight that met the eyes of Young Wild West and his friends as they dismounted and stood on the ledge.

With terrific force, the frightened herd of cattle ploughed its way through the gully that was gradually narrowing.

The heat of the thousands of hoofs made a noise almost like thunder, and the bellowing of the cattle that were forced to the ground, only to be trampled into a pulp, sounded weird and unnatural.

It was not the first cattle stampede our friends had witnessed, but never before had they seen such a sight as was now before them.

The steers could not turn either way—they had to go straight ahead or fall!

On they came, and soon the leaders were dashing by in a mad fury to get somewhere.

But there was no broad plain for them to emerge upon, as our friends well knew.

The further they went the narrower they would find the gully, and it must eventually be that those that went down would check the mad rush.

For five minutes they kept going past in a surging stream, and then it was noticed that the rush was dying out.

It was evident that the leaders had become jammed and gone down, though there was a sharp bend above, and our friends could not see just what had happened.

A herd of steers is easy to be frightened into a stampede, and sometimes the fright leaves them as quickly as it comes.

But seldom until more or less damage has been done.

In this case the damage was great, for tons of beef had gone to waste in that hollow strip, which broadened as it came to the open prairie.

Five minutes more and the cattle were almost wedged to a standstill.

Terrified and exhausted, they remained almost stock still, and then they gradually began to move up the gully.

It was not long before they were at a walk.

"They're goin' on over ther dead ones now," observed Cheyenne Charlie, as he shrugged his shoulders and twisted the ends of his long, black mustache. "I reckon there's enough beef gone ter waste ter keep a small city in meat for six months. Siah things is bound ter happen, though there's generally got ter be a cause for it."

"That's right," answered Wild, "and we must find out what the cause of this stampede was. We'll wait here a while, and the chances are that we will find out."

It was just about twenty minutes from the time the leaders of the stampeding herd had passed them when the stragglers at the end came in sight.

Then it was that our friends saw the cause of it all.

A dozen cowboys suddenly appeared, following the herd and riding at an easy gait.

"Ah!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "It looks as though those fellows might be cattle thieves, boys. They have run that herd off the range to the mouth of the gully, and then they have frightened them into a run, somehow. I reckon we'll have to investigate this."

The young deadshot was always ready to take a hand in preventing crime, and the moment he thought the cowboys were cattle thieves he was ready to balk their game if he could.

The cowboys came on up the gully, and as they got nearer it could be seen that they were in a high state of glee.

Young Wild West mounted his horse.

"Come on, boys," he said to his two partners. "The rest of you stay up here."

What the dashing young deadshot said was always accepted as the proper thing by his friends, and there was a nod all around.

The three rode down and waited for a dozen cowboys to come up.

The latter seemed not a little surprised to see them there, since they could not imagine where they had come from so suddenly.

Their gleeful manner turned to one of deep concern almost immediately.

"Hello!" called out the leader. "How did yer manage ter git clear of ther stampede?"

"Oh, we got out of the way, all right," replied our hero. "What did you start the cattle up the gully for?"

"That's our business!" came the curt reply.

"Oh! It is, eh? What ranch do you belong to?"

"That's our business, too!"

"Ah! Then you might as well admit that you are cattle thieves, and that you started the herd up the gully



for the purpose of driving off those that survived and selling them. Is that it?"

"See here!" exclaimed the leader, who was a wicked-looking young man, with a swarthy face and long, straggly, black hair. "I reckon you're altogether too insultin', young feller. What you want is a lead pill!"

He placed his hand on the butt of a revolver as he spoke.

"You just take your hand away from that gun, my friend," said Wild, with wonderful coolness. "If you don't you'll drop from the back of that cayuse so quick that you won't know what caused it!"

Then, as quick as a wink, the boy whipped out his Smith & Wesson and covered the cowboy leader.

At the same moment Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart unslung their rifles and leveled them at the reckless-looking gang.

"If you're lookin' fur fight, yer measly coyotes, jest say so!" exclaimed the scout, a dangerous glitter in his dark eyes. "I feel jest like pumpin' lead inter a gang of cattle thieves!"

"And if you can't do it fast enough, Charlie, we'll help you out from up here!" called out Arietta, the charming, golden-haired sweetheart of Young Wild West, from the ledge above.

The cowboys were thunderstruck.

There was no doubt that they were guilty of just what the hero had accused them of, and the helligrent attitude they had shown, after recovering from their surprise at meeting the three right in the path the stampeding cattle had followed, now changed to one of fear and amazement.

But there was a sort of brazen coolness about the leader, after all, and, looking straight at the young deadshot, he said:

"Who are you, young feller?"

"I am Young Wild West," was the quick reply.

"I thought so. Well, let me tell yer somethin', Young Wild West! I'm Buck Davis, the Cowboy Trailer! I'm goin' ter leave yer now; but yer kin bet that I'll be on your trail from now until I git yer! Any galoot as calls me a cattle thief has got ter die, sooner or later! Remember that!"

Then, notwithstanding the fact that both he and his friends were covered, the villainous leader started to ride off up the gully.

## CHAPTER II.

WILD GIVES THE COWBOY TRAILER SOMETHING TO REMEMBER HIM BY.

"Hold on!" said Young Wild West, coolly. "Don't be in a hurry. When a man makes a threat to me I generally give him something to remember me. Just hold out your arms, and I will loosen your shirt sleeves for you."

The villainous leader of the cowboys had stopped as the boy started to speak to him, and he now sat in the saddle, looking at him, as though he did not quite understand him.

"I see you have got the sleeves of that nice, new, red flannel shirt buttoned with big, white pearl buttons," went on our hero, a peculiar smile playing about his lips. "Now, just hold out your arms, and I'll make the buttons disappear. Do as I say!"

His voice rang out sharply as the command was given. Meanwhile Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart had not taken their rifles from their shoulders, and the girls on the ledge were also covering the rest of the cowboys; so they had not dared to move.

If their faces had been photographed just then the picture would have portrayed one of absolute astonishment.

Buck Davis lost his composure now.

"What do yer mean?" he asked.

"Just what I said. If you don't hold out your hands I'll shoot at you jest as you are, and then maybe you'll get hurt."

It was a hard pill to swallow, but the villain had to do it.

There was something in the manner of the dashing boy that told him that there was no trifling with him.

"Oh, I'll hold out my hands," he said, as he slowly raised them from his sides. "You've got ther bulge on me, an' it ain't no disgrace ter do as you're told in a case like that."

He had no sooner spread out his arms than the young deadshot pulled the trigger of his revolver.

Crack!

The sleeve on the right arm of the man flew open at the wristband, and the big pearl button had disappeared.

Crack!

Again the weapon barked and the button on the left sleeve was seen no more.

"Now," said the dashing boy, as he calmly brushed back his long, chestnut hair with his left hand. "I reckon you can go, if you want to. I shall remember your threat; and I guess you'll remember what I did to you for making it. You can trail me all you like; but look out for me the next time I take a shot at you! It may be that I'll want your heart the next time, and not the buttons on your shirt sleeves. Good morning!"

Buck Davis did not wait a second, but, putting spurs to his broncho, galloped away in the direction the herd of cattle had gone.

"Proceed, gentlemen," said Young Wild West, with mock politeness, as he turned to the eleven men, who were waiting, anxiously.

They were very glad of the opportunity to do so, and more than one sigh of relief was heard as they tightened the reins of their steeds and rode off.

"It are sorter tough, ain't it?" called out Cheyenne Charlie. "A whole dozen of rip-snortin' galoots ter be sot on by a few, like us. Wow! But it does me good ter see yer ride off like a lot of licked wolves!"

A hearty laugh wound up the scout's remarks, but the cowboys made no reply to it.

They had seen a sample of the fancy shooting of Young Wild West, and none of them wanted him to try it on them.

Not until they had disappeared around the bend did Wild call for the girls and the Chinamen to come down from the ledge.



"I reckon we can go now," he said. "There must be a ranch somewhere within a few miles from here. We will go to it and find out who those cattle belong to."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Jim Dart. "They are a bad lot, and they drove the cattle to this gully on purpose to get away with the most of them. The chances are that they are regular cattle thieves, and are driving them to a buyer."

"Well, it would be impossible for us to turn the cattle back," Wild answered. "So the best thing we can do is to find out where they belong and then report what we have seen."

"If the Cowboy Trailer keeps his word, Wild, he will be back after you," said Arietta, with a laugh. "He seemed dreadfully in earnest when he made the threat."

"Well, I reckon he is just about the sort of a fellow who lives for revenge," was the reply. "I won't be a bit surprised if he does follow us."

"He'll wish he hadn't if he does," the scout remarked, tapping the butt of his rifle, significantly.

The party rode on past a big bunch of dead cattle, and in a few minutes they were out on the open prairie.

Five miles off to the right they saw a strip of timber, and behind it smoke was seen rising, as though from a campfire.

Young Wild West headed straight for that point.

"It may be that the smoke comes from the chimney of a ranch house," he said. "We will soon find out."

It was near the hour of noon, and they were all beginning to get hungry, for they had been in the saddle almost continually since early morning.

Young Wild West and his friends spent the most of their time in riding about the wildest parts of the West and Southwest in search of fortune and adventure.

Our hero and his partners were pretty well fixed in money matters, since they owned and had shares in different gold and silver mines.

Wild also owned two ranches, too, and though he did not realize much profit from them, he kept them, so they could have places to go when they felt like taking a rest.

The girls had learned to like the outdoor life as well as the dashing young deadshot and his partners, though Anna, the wife of the scout, and Eloise Gardner, the sweetheart of Jim Dart, were not natives of the West.

They had been there just long enough to get used to it, however, and what would have been called terrible dangers by the ladies of the cities and towns of the East were looked upon by them now as common occurrences.

At the time of which we write the West was in a much wilder state than it now is, and the dangers to be encountered in traveling from place to place were many.

But danger was what Young Wild West and his two partners liked.

They had made names for themselves in hunting down villainous road agents and outlaws, and helping to suppress Indian uprisings, and they were always looking for the opportunity to help honest people, who were being harassed by the foes of civilization.

As we find them they are on their way to Buckhorn Ranch, down on the Rio Grande, one of Young Wild

West's ranches, where they hoped to spend a week or two in comparative quiet.

Arietta had remarked that it would be strange, indeed, if they reached the ranch without running into some sort of an adventure that would interrupt their journey, and the meeting with the gang of cowboys, who had driven the herd of cattle into a stampede, seemed to bear her out.

Now that all danger was over, the two Chinamen looked happy.

They were just plain, ordinary Celestials, as far as looks went; but one of them was far more than that.

His name was Hop Wah, and he was kept in their employ more because he had become a fixture to the party than for the work he did.

But he had been the means of saving their lives on more than one occasion, and that made him solid with all hands.

Though he looked to be the more innocent of the two, he was really one of the smartest Chinamen that ever sported a queue.

He was a very clever sleight-of-hand performer, a born humorist, a professional card sharp, and liked whisky.

Added to these qualifications—if they may be so called—he could lie a little, and steal sometimes, when there was no necessity for it.

Wing Wah, the cook, who was his brother, was just what he looked to be, an honest, faithful fellow.

He liked to sleep as well as he did work, however, and he was prone to be led off by his brother sometimes.

Just now the two were chatting as though they had just struck up an acquaintance, and the conversation was about what had just taken place.

"My blother gittes allee samce muchee scaree," said Hop, striking in on a different tack. "Me no 'flaid lillee bit, so be."

"You velly muchee 'flaid, so be," contradicted Wing, who was willing to admit that he was frightened. "You allee samce tellee muchee lie, my blother!"

"Shet up!" roared Cheyenne Charlie. "If yer can't talk without windin' up in a quarrel, keep yer mouths shet!"

"Allee light, Mialer Charlie," retorted the cook, meekly.

But Hop only grinned.

He was so used to the scout that he did not fear him any more.

"Mialer Charlie allee light," he said; "but he no know how playee um dlaw poken."

"I know how ter play it, all right. But I wouldn't play no more with you," was the retort. "You're a cheat of ther worst kind, an' any one us ever plays with yer will find it out."

"Me play velly muchee square gamee, so be, Mialer Charlie. Me velly lucky Chinee, so ba."

Just then a party of horsemen came out of the timber they were heading for, so the conversation was cut short.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OUR FRIENDS ARRIVE AT PARROT RANCH.

There were eight of them, and they seemed to be in a hurry to meet the strangers they saw coming.



Our friends saw that the horsemen were ordinary cowboys as they got a little nearer.

"Hello, there!" one of them called out, as they came within talking distance. "Did yer see anything of a big herd of cattle?"

"I reckon we did," Wild answered, quickly. "Who does the herd belong to?"

"It belongs to our boss. We took last night off an' went ter a dance down in Shin Holler. We left ther cattle right here. There was about fourteen hundred of 'em, an' as here was ther best grass fur miles around, we thought sure that they wouldn't stray off."

"Well, I guess they would have stayed around here if some one had not come along and drove them off," Wild said, as he brought his horse to a halt close to the spokesman of the party.

"Some one drove 'em off!"

The cowboy leader was greatly surprised.

Our hero was pretty sure that they were honest fellows, and that the leader had told the exact truth in what he stated.

"Do you know a fellow who calls himself the Cowboy Trailer?" he queried.

"I reckon we do, young feller. You mean Buck Davis, ther cattle thief?"

"Exactly. Well, he was the galoot that drove off the cattle. He had his gang with him, of course. They drove them up the gully about two miles from here, and then they got them frightened into a regular stampede. It was a sight to see the cattle rushing through the gully, especially where it narrowed. We were just lucky enough to reach high ground in time to get out of the way. I reckon your boss owns a good many less live cattle now than he did before the stampede. As many as a couple of hundred of them must have gone down in the rush."

The cowboys were electrified at this piece of news.

"Boys, we hadn't oughter have gone away last night," the leader said, shaking his head. "It is all our fault that this thing has happened. None of us thought that Buck Davis was anywhere around here, though. Ther last we heard of him he was a hundred miles away, among ther ridges. This is tough luck! We'd jest about finished roundin' up ther cattle, too! Boss Robinson will nigh have a fit when he finds this out. But, come on! We must git as many of ther cattle as we kin. It ain't likely that Buck Davis an' his gang will stay long enough ter git more'n a hundred or so after they git through ther gully. Ther steers will scatter then, an' we will do ther best we kin with 'em. If we run across Davis an' his gang there'll be some shootin' ter be done. We won't take water, boys! It's our fault that ther thievin' galoots went off with ther herd, an' we'll die fightin' fur ther boss' property, that's all!"

Our friends admired the manner of the man who said this.

There was an air of determination about him that they liked.

"How far is the ranch from here?" Wild asked, as they were going to ride away.

"Five miles ther other side of ther timber," was the reply. "If you stop there jest let ther boss down as easy as yer kin, will yer? We're goin' ter do our best an' git

ther cattle together, an' fetch 'em back. Ther boss has got company from ther East, an' he's jest about as happy as ther parrot what ther ranch is named after. It would upset him if he heard all at once jest what's happened. Let him down easy."

"All right," Wild answered. "We will let him down very easy, for we won't say anything about the cattle until you come back. How will that do?"

"That's fine! Whoopce! Give ther strangers a cheer, boys!"

The cowboys did not need to be told twice.

They let out a rousing old cheer that awoke the echoes in the woods.

Then the leader paused long enough to let them know that his name was Frank Carr, and that he was the foreman of Parrot Ranch.

"All right," our hero answered. "I am Young Wild West, and these are my friends. We will ride over to the ranch and stay there till you get back. Then we will try and help you run down the cattle thieves."

"Hooray!" cried Carr, waving his hat. "It's Young Wild West, boys! An' he's goin' ter help us catch Buck Davis an' his gang. Hooray! Hooray!"

Then another cheer went up.

But Young Wild West and his friends were used to that sort of thing, and they only smiled.

Wild felt pretty certain that he had not seen the last of the cattle thieves, even if he did not go after them.

Buck Davis, who boasted that he was the Cowboy Trailer, was just the kind of a villain to look for satisfaction, and there was no doubt but what he thought he was entitled to some from Young Wild West.

The cowboys soon rode off on the trail of the cattle, and, taking to the timber, our friends rode through.

Then they saw what appeared to be a very comfortable ranch in the distance.

The house was comparatively new, and the barns and other buildings were in the best of order.

The big corral was about a mile from the house at the nearest end of it, and there was quite a lot of cattle in it.

These were no doubt ready to be driven to the market.

"I reckon Boss Robinson, as Carr called him, must be putty well fixed," observed Charlie, as he took in the scene, and gave a nod of approval.

"It looks that way," Wild answered. "But he has met with a loss this morning that is bound to make a good, big hole in his money pile, though. Even if the cowboys get what is left of the herd away from the cattle thieves, he will be out a few thousands."

"Them galoots ought to be strung up—every one of them!" the scout declared.

"Well, the chances are that they will all get their medicine before long. I have made up my mind to take a hand in the game. When a rascally galoot threatens me, like Buck Davis did, it is time to look after him. I shall wait to find out whether or not he means to put his threat in execution before I do anything. I know you and Jim will be in with me, heart and soul."

"You kin bet your life on that!" was the reply, while Dart nodded, as though it was a matter of course.

They soon neared the house, and when they did so they found a young man and a girl sitting on the porch.



It was easy to tell by their attire that they were not natives or even inhabitants of that part of the country.

"Them's ther company from ther East, I reckon," observed Cheyenne Charlie, with a grin. "Lovers, too, I reckon."

"You could see that with one eye shut and the other all but," Jim spoke up.

The girls smiled.

Somehow, they were always pleased to see young lovers.

Probably it was because they knew all about it.

Charlie and Anna, though they had been married more than two years, were about the same as lovers the biggest part of the time.

The only apparent difference was that the scout did a little bit more as he pleased than he did while courting.

One thing, Anna had induced him to give up his habit of indulging in a spree now and then.

He drank whisky occasionally, but never to excess.

But he had been reared with the rough bordermen, and there was no chance for him to be anything different.

The young couple arose to greet them as they rode up and halted.

Then the girl called to some one in the house, and the next minute a middle-aged man and woman came out.

It was just as easy to tell that they were the ranchman and his wife as it was to tell that the young couple were "leaderfeet."

"How are yer, strangers?" called out the man, cheerily. "You're welcome ter Parrot Ranch, as ther boys have nicknamed it. Hey, Bill! Come an' show ther boys where ter put their horses, an' let ther gals come right in ther house."

A lame man, with a stare that was half-idiotic, came around from the rear of the house and paused before the new arrivals.

Wild dismounted, and his partners followed suit.

Then they assisted the girls to the ground, after which they followed the man called Bill to the barn.

Arietta quickly introduced themselves to the young lady, and she, in turn, introduced them to the rest.

The girls found that the four were Ranchman Robinson and his wife, and Maggie Neal and Fred Martin, from the East.

The girl was a niece of the Robinsons, and it proved that she had such an ardent lover that he had followed her to the ranch in less than a week after she came there to pay a month's visit.

This the girls learned in a very short time, for the housewife was a very talkative woman, and she lost no time in telling them all about it.

The young couple did a lot of blushing, but neither of them denied it.

It was not long before Wild and his two partners came back, leaving the two Chinamen and the half-witted fellow named Bill to take care of the horses.

A stranger is always welcome at a Texas ranch, and to say that the Robinsons were glad to have them there would hardly express it.

And Fred Martin and his sweetheart were simply delighted at the presence of the young people.

"You're jest as welcome here as ther flowers in spring-time!" the ranchman declared, when Wild spoke about

paying him for accommodations for a day or two. "An' it won't cost yer one red cent—not if yer stay a month! That's ther kind of hairpin I am, an' don't yer furgit it!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CLEVER CHINAMAN AND THE HALF-WITTED MAN.

It will be in order for us to pay a little attention to the clever Chinaman belonging to Young Wild West's party.

It was not strange that the half-witted fellow named Bill should try to poke fun at the heathen pair the moment he found himself alone in the stable with them.

Many a man possessing better sense than he would have done the same thing, for there is something about a Chinaman that arouses a peculiar sort of interest in most people who have not associated with them, and those inclined to pick at and tease others is pretty sure to jump at the chance to get a "heathen Chinese" for a victim.

It was that way with Bill. His knowledge of things in general was rather vague, but whenever he met a person whom he thought was a bigger fool than he was himself he always "went for them," so to speak.

Wild and his partners had no sooner left the stable when he turned to Hop, who was busy unloading one of the pack horses, and observed:

"I reckon when they made you they sorter slit you 'ere hole a little crooked, didn't they? It's ther same way with ther other feller, to. Do yer know why they done it?"

Bill could ask puzzling questions, if he wasn't exactly right; but he had struck the wrong one this time.

Hop sized him up a moment and then tapped his forehead, significantly.

"When ley made you, allee samee, ley forgittee puttee is all um blains, so be," he answered, smiling sweetly.

"He, he, he!" giggled the man, not taking the least bit of exception to the remark. "You're a putty good talker, fur a Chince, I must say. Folks do say that I ain't exactly right, but I don't know about it. I think I'm putty cute. One thing about me, I kin make folks laugh."

"You allee light, but you no left in um oven long enough; you no gittee cookee done, so be."

"Say!" said Bill, who had drifted West all the way from the State of Maine. "How will yer swap knives?"

He pulled a big jackknife from his pocket and held it up.

"Me looker at um knifec, and if me likce me givee you allee samee fivee oblee," was the reply.

Bill felt like jumping out of his boots.

The fact was that the blade was badly nicked and the spring in the back of the handle was broken.

"Don't open her," he said; "jest see if yer like her without openin' her."

"Allee light."

The Chinaman took the knife, and Wing paused in his work and stepped over to witness the transaction.

Hop looked the knife over, but did not attempt to open it.



Then he produced a five-dollar bill and tendered it to the man.

Bill grabbed for it eagerly, but before his fingers could touch it the bill disappeared.

"Whatt'ee matter?" asked Hop, looking at him in innocent surprise, for the half-witted fellow's eyes suddenly bulged from the sockets.

"Where did it go?" was the gasping reply.

"You take um fivee dollee velly muchee quickee, so be. You velly funny man, allee samee."

"Did—did you see—see that five-dollar bill?" Bill asked, turning to Wing, who stood looking on, a sleepy expression on his yellow face.

"Me see; len me no see," was the truthful retort.

"You puttee in um pocket," said Hop, and then he made out that he was reaching in the man's trousers pockets to find out.

But he really let something drop in the pocket.

"You gottee um fivee dollee bill in um pocket, so be," he declared.

Bill promptly thrust his hand there to get his fingers on it.

Then it was that he pulled out what appeared to be a live, wriggling snake.

"Wow!" he yelled, dropping it and starting to run.

"Mister Robinson—Mister Robinson! Murder! Murder!"

"Man allee samee velly muchee fool, so be," Hop remarked to his brother, as he picked the snake up and put it in his pocket.

As it was made of rubber and painted in pretty good imitation of a rattler, there was nothing strange in his doing this.

Wing grinned.

"My blother velly muchee smartee," he said, as he returned to his work.

Hop shook his head, as though he could not understand why it was that there were so many foolish people in the world, and then he, too, resumed his work.

They soon got done, and just as they were leaving the stable to go to the house they saw Bill coming back, with the ranchman and Wild close at his heels.

Hop saw that Wild was laughing, and that gave him courage to proceed further with his funny business.

"What's ther matter?" Robinson asked, looking at the two Chinamen, with no little curiosity. "Where's ther snake this foolish galoot is talkin' about?"

"Here um lillee snakee," Hop answered promptly, and he quickly drew it from his pocket and tossed it to the ranchman.

No one would offer to catch a live rattler if it were thrown to him, and as Robinson thought it was a real one, he jumped back out of the way, and Wild caught it.

"Here it is, Mr. Robinson," he said, smilingly. "That Chinaman is a rather clever fellow. He is up to all sorts of tricks, and is no more like an ordinary Chinese than fire is like water. The looks is about as far as it goes with him. I suppose he has been having a little fun with your man here, that's all."

"Yes, but I don't want nothin' ter do with a rattler, even if it is dead."

"Well, this one was never alive. It is made of rubber; take it and see for yourself."

The ranchman took it rather gingerly.

"Hanged if that ain't a putty good imitation!" he exclaimed; and then he turned to the frightened Bill and added:

"There ain't no use in me tellin' you that you're a fool, Bill, 'cause you know that much already. It serves yer right—that's all I've got ter say!"

"He, he, he!"

Bill giggled and looked more foolish than ever.

But suddenly a gleam of intelligence shone in his eyes, and, looking at his boss, he said:

"Ther snake may be rubber; but how about ther five-dollar bill, Mister Robinson?"

"What five-dollar bill, Bill?"

"Lis fivee dollar bill, Bill!" spoke up Hop, and then he showed the same bill and offered it to the ranchman.

As Robinson went to take it the bill disappeared exactly as it had done with the half-witted man.

"Don't mind him," spoke up Wild. "There is an elastic string to the money, and it merely flew up his sleeve when he let go of it."

"Well, I declare!"

Robinson was certainly astonished.

"Since he has seen fit to begin his funny business so soon, we will take him to the house and let him give a little entertainment," went on our hero. "You'll find that he is as good as a circus, Mr. Robinson."

"But he's got my jackknife!" spoke up the half-witted man, acting as though he thought it was a very valuable article.

"Me givee you\*um knifee pletty soonee, so be," said Hop, smiling blandly.

Then they all set out for the house, the ranchman asking all manner of questions above the clever Celestial.

Wild's partners and the girls, as well as those belonging at the ranch, were on the little porch that ran along the front of the house, and the smiling faces of our friends told the ranchman that they knew pretty nearly what had been going on.

The ranchman related what he had heard and seen in his own way, and his wife opened wide her eyes.

"Well, did you ever?" she exclaimed.

"A sort of magician, I guess," remarked Fred Martin. "I never saw a Chinese at it, but I suppose there are some of them who are very clever, as well as those of any other race."

"You tell us just how it all happened, Bill," said Maggie Neal, a twinkle in her dark eyes. The girl had been very much amused at the actions of the man since she had been an inmate of the ranch house, and she enjoyed hearing him talk.

"Well, I'll tell her jest how it was, Miss Maggie," he answered, for he liked to talk to her, probably because he thought she took more notice of him than any of the rest. "Yer see, I thought I'd joke a little with that feller, an' I asked him why it was that they made his eye-holes slit bias when he was made. Then he tapped his head, as much as ter say that I was a little off—which is right, yer know—an' he told me that when I was made they fergot to put in all my brains. He, he, he!"



They all laughed but Charlie, who looked disgusted.

"When a fool knows he's one, an' seems glad of it, I reckon it's time ter let him alone," he observed.

"I want my knife," spoke up Bill, suddenly.

"Allee light," answered Hop, bringing it to light. "Ma showee lillee flick first, so be. Evelybody watches."

Out came the big yellow silk handkerchief he always had with him, and then he carefully proceeded to wrap the jackknife in it.

It was one of the old tricks that Wild and his friends had seen done so many times that they took little interest in it.

But it was new to the rest, so they awaited to see what would happen with eagerness.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE COWBOY TRAILER'S FOUL SCHEME.

As soon as the villainous cattle thieves got out of sight of Young Wild West and his friends they slowed their horses down to a walk.

"Boys," said the Cowboy Trailer, "I reckon that was what yer might call a little surprise party, wasn't it?"

"I reckon it was, Buck," one of them answered, with a shake of the head, while the rest nodded.

"They sartinly got us dead ter rights; but that's all right! I never yet seen ther galoot what could down me in ther long run. Young Wild West, eh? I've heard of that boy an' his pards. They're about ther three worst galoots what ever traveled around lookin' fur cattle thieves, I reckon. I've heard say they always land what they start after; but when they git after us they'll find that some one will git after them, an' that he'll stick till he gits 'em. It's me, ther Cowboy Trailer, boys! You know why I hold that title—it's fur two reasons: One is that I'm a cowboy, and never let up when I git on a trail; an' ther other is that I'm always hot after ther cowboys what interferes with our business."

"We know that, Buck," said the man who had spoken before. "But ther question is what are we goin' ter do? How many of ther cattle do yer expect to git away with this trip?"

"Jest as many as we kin keep together, boys. Young Wild West or no Young Wild West, we're goin' ter land them cattle an' git ther money fur 'em! We'll git 'em over inter ther territory afore morning, an' we'll find ther money waitin' fur us. Then I'm goin' ter take ther trail of Young Wild West, an' yer kin bet that I'll feller him till I git him!"

"You'll git him, all right, Buck!" exclaimed one of the cowboys. "There ain't nothin' that you can't do, when yer once make up your mind ter do it."

"Hooray fur Buck Davis, ther Cowboy Trailer!" cried another.

Then the whole band broke into a cheer.

The feeling of dismay that had been upon them since Young Wild West had called them so hard now left them, and once more they felt like themselves.

They soon came up with the cattle, but the steers were

moving slowly now, and they did not try to get them on a run again.

In this way they continued until the end of the gully was reached.

They found that the herd had split and wandered off in all directions, so they set about to rounding up what they could of them, and at the end of an hour they had barely a hundred of them to make off with.

They had been so busy that they had failed to keep a watch around, and just as they started off a yell sounded from a big clump of cedars on the hill, and then the cowboys from Parrot Ranch appeared.

The cowboys had been watching them for some time, and they now took care to come out ahead of the cattle, so they would be turned back into the gully.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Buck Davis. "I thought them galoots would git too full of tanglefoot last night ter git around to-day. Look out, boys! Git ter cover. There's no use in runnin' ther risk of gittin' shot. There's Frank Carr there, an' he ain't ter be fooled with. Git ter cover, an' then if they foller us up, give 'em a dose of lead!"

Regardless of the fact that they might lose all chance of keeping the cattle, the villains made for the woods, a hundred yards off to the right.

The cowboys from the ranch became silent now, for they had managed to turn the cattle along the back trail, and they did not want to frighten them.

Two of the cattle thieves had rifles with them, but force from Parrot's Ranch were armed only with the shooters and hunting knives.

The cowboys were elated when they saw the rascally gang turn and flee, and when they saw that nearly all the cattle were trotting back into the gully they rode after the men.

The moment the Cowboy Trailer and his men reached the cover of the trees they dismounted.

"Give it ter 'em, boys!" the leader shouted. "We outnumber 'em, an' I reckon no gang like that is goin' ter run us. We're wanted by ther Sheriff, anyhow, so what difference does it make if we drop a few cowboys?"

Crack! Crack!

The two men with the rifles fired.

One of the cowboys had his hat shot off, and Frank Carr just escaped by a hair.

They turned and galloped away, however, for they realized that they stood a poor chance against the rifles.

"I reckon that fixed 'em," said Buck, triumphantly. "Maybe it's jest as well that yer didn't drop any of 'em, boys. There ain't no use in shootin' ther fools, without they try ter shoot us. But there's one galoot what has got ter go under, without his tryin' ter shoot us, though, an' that is Young Wild West!"

"How about ther cattle, Buck?" asked one of them.

"Well, we'll have ter round up some more of 'em, I reckon," was the reply.

This they started to do a few minutes later, but they soon found that they were going to have no easy time of it, for just as they got about a dozen of the steers together the cowboys appeared at the edge of the woods and opened fire on them.

The range was too far, however, and none of them was hit.



But they rode away and left the cattle, only to try in another direction.

Once more they got a number of the steers together and then the same thing happened.

"Boys, I reckon we'd better give it up, an' let 'em go on back. There'll be a hundred or so left around in the woods, an' we'll round 'em up afore night an' be off with 'em. One thing about it, I ain't goin' over ther line with-out some cattle, if it takes a week!"

They moved up to a spot on the side of the slope and went into camp.

From this point they could see a long distance, so they would be safe from a sudden attack.

The villains had rations with them, and soon they had a fire started and were boiling coffee.

There were no ranches up that way, so they were not afraid of being interfered with by any one else.

The land belonging to Robinson was the furthestmost up the line, and the most of the range that his cattle grazed upon belonged to the Government.

While they were eating their dinner nearly half a dozen of the cattle came along that way and stopped near them to graze.

"I reckon more will come this way," said the Cowboy Trailer. "We ain't goin' ter git stumped entirely."

They remained there the whole afternoon, and as night came on the cattle started back for the gully.

"We have that rifle of yours, Jake," said Buck. "When we have it we might have ter stay around here a day or two. We'll have fresh meat, anyhow."

The rifle was handed him, and, taking a good aim, he fired and shot a young steer.

As the beast dropped the rest ran in terror, straight for the gully.

"Let 'em go!" exclaimed the villain. "I blame Young Wild West fur all this, an' I won't go back till I've squared accounts with him. Give me a hand, boys. We'll soon git what meat we want an' leave ther rest fur ther coyotes."

In half an hour's time they had what meat they thought they might need, and then they left the remainder of the carcass where it fell.

The sun went down and it became dark.

Though it had the animal heat in it, the villains cooked some of the beef over the coals and had a feast.

There was water close at hand, so they were all right in that respect.

After a while the moon came up, and then it was that Buck Davis decided to do a daring piece of business.

"Boys," said he, "I'm goin' ter start on ther trail of Young Wild West now. I'm goin' ter Parrot Ranch."

His men looked at him in amazement.

"Ain't it risky, Buck?" Jake asked.

"Sartinly it's risky. But did yer ever hear of me gittin' caught when I went out alone? Ain't I been through enough of that kind of business ter know how ter keep out of ther way of harm? I reckon I kin git right up to that ranch an' have a look at all what's there, without gittin' caught, too!"

"Well, I've always had putty good luck at sneakin' around in ther dark, too. S'pose you let me go along with yer?"

"I was goin' ter ask yer to, Jake. I know you're ther best man I've got fur sly work. We'll ride over to Parrot's Ranch, an' if we git ther chance we'll burn a barn, or somethin'. It may be that I'll git a shot at Young Wild West, too."

"Good enough!" said Jake.

The rest acted as though they were very glad that they had not been invited to go on such an expedition.

They had seen just enough of Young Wild West to make them feel that it was not safe to fool around where he was.

Buck and Jake were not long in getting ready to leave.

Bidding his men to remain right there until he came back, the Cowboy Trailer rode off with his companion.

They soon reached the gully, and, riding on through it rather slowly, they came out at the other end and galloped for the timber strip.

The nearer he got to the ranch the more Buck felt like doing something fiendish.

"I tell yer what we'll do, Jake," he said, as they finally emerged from the timber and came in sight of the ranch house lights. "You go to ther stable an' steal Robinson's best horse, which is a mighty good one, as yer know, an' then set ther stable on fire an' burn up ther rest. I'll sneak up to ther house an' try ter git a shot at that boy!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### HOP AND THE PARROT.

When Hop Wah had finished wrapping the handkerchief about the jackknife he laid it on the porch and said:

"Me allee samee velly muchee smartee Chinese; me makee knifee turnee to um lillee mouse, so be."

"He, he, he!" laughed Bill, for the remark sounded very funny to him.

But they who were eager to see what would happen remained perfectly silent.

Hop made some mysterious passes over the handkerchief and muttered some gibberish, after which he looked at the half-witted man and exclaimed:

"You lookee in um handkerchief; you findee your knife havee allee samee turnee in um lillee mouse. Me allee samee velly smartee Chinese, and pletty soonee me turnee you into um biggee jackass, with velly long ears, so be."

Bill did not know just what to make of this kind of talk, and he hesitated about opening the handkerchief.

"Here, I'll open it fur yer, if you're afraid," spoke up the ranchman. "Yer know very well that there ain't nothin' more than your old knife there. Ther Chinese is a joker, an' he couldn't turn an old knife into a mouse."

He took hold of the handkerchief and unconsciously gave the contents a squeeze.

Instantly there was a squealing noise, and as he opened his hand the handkerchief moved, showing that there was something struggling to get out of it.

That was a little too much for Ranchman Robinson. There was no rubber snake about this!



A rubber snake couldn't squeal and move of its own accord.

He let the handkerchief drop, and as it struck the porch floor a mouse jumped out and ran for its life.

Maggie Neal uttered a scream, for she was almost as much afraid of a mouse as she was of a rattlesnake.

"Me tellee you, so be," said Hop, nodding to the half-witted man. "Now you lose your knife; it lun away, allee samee."

Bill stood with wide-open mouth.

He could not understand even the first principle of it.

That Hop had placed the knife in the handkerchief he was just about as sure of as he was that he was alive at that minute.

He had said that he was going to make the knife turn into a mouse, and he had surely done it.

That was the way the half-witted fellow looked at it.

But the ranchman, after he recovered from his surprise, looked at the clever Chinaman and grinned.

"It's all right," he said. "I don't know how he managed it, but that's ther best thing I ever seen done. Sleight-of-hand is mighty good, I reckon."

Hop now took Bill by the arm and led him off, as though he was going to tell him something on the quiet.

He quietly slipped the old jackknife in the fellow's pocket, and then whispered:

"Me velly solly you knife lun away."

"He, he, he! I'm sorter sorry myself, though it weren't no good. Say, wouldn't I have stuck you if you had give that five-dollar bill fur it? He, he, he!"

Hop stepped away from him and looked very much surprised.

"Where you finde um knife?" he asked.

"Where did I find it? Why, I ain't found it!"

"You gottlee in um pocket."

Bill felt right away, and, much to his surprise, brought out the knife.

This was very mystifying to the half-witted fellow, and the ranchman and his wife could not see through it, either.

But when Wild explained that the Chinaman had probably caught the mouse in the stable, and that it was very easy for him to substitute it in the handkerchief for the knife, they began to realize.

"But how did ther knife git in Bill's pocket?" asked the good housewife.

"Oh, I reckon Hop put it there when he called him aside."

"Oh!"

She nodded and was satisfied.

"I reckon it's high time that dinner was ready, Mary," said Robinson, when he saw Hop walk around the house toward the rear. "Jest see to it that them two Chinees fellers gits as good as we do. That feller, Hop, is a regular hum-scorchier, an' he deserves ther best there is in ther house."

"He'll come mighty near gittin' it, whether yer want him ter have it or not," Cheyenne Charlie spoke up. "Hop never goes short."

As our friends walked into the sitting room of the ranch house they were startled by a shrill, almost unearthly scream that came from the rear of the building.

"Murder! Murder! Injuns! Injuns!" rang out, with piercing distinctness.

"What's that?" asked Wild, as he pulled his revolver and made a leap for the kitchen.

"It's only ther old, green parrot we've got," replied the ranchman, with a grin. "That's one on you folks. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I should say it was!" our hero retorted. "I ought to have known that it was no human being screaming like that. The voice is altogether too cracked. I reckon I'll have a look at that bird."

He walked on through into the kitchen, and then outside, where the parrot's cage was hanging to the limb of a tree.

Polly was looking intently at Hop and Wing, who was standing near the cage, very much interested.

"Ther parrot must have thought them two was Injuns, I reckon," said Robinson, with a laugh. "Polly is a very cute bird. She knows more than some folks, I believe."

"Hello, Pop!" called out the bird, as she saw the head of the house. "Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Murder! Injuns!"

Our friends found themselves laughing, in spite of themselves.

"Velly funny bird, so be," remarked Wing, shaking his head. "Talkee allee samee Melican man."

Hop said nothing just then.

But he was doing a lot of thinking.

He was wondering what would happen if he let the parrot out of the cage.

Mrs. Robinson was busy getting the table set for dinner, and when she saw what she was at her niece ran to help her.

Our friends then made use of the well that was right near the house, and a few minutes later they were ready for dinner.

The two Chinamen remained near the parrot's cage with Bill, who seemed to take delight in the curiosity they showed.

"Um pallot allee samee bitce velly much quicke!" Wing asked.

"No," answered Bill, quickly. "She's awful tame. Jest put your finger in ther cage an' scratch her head. That's what she likes."

Wing reached out his hand, and the bird put down its head, as though it wanted to be scratched.

Then he put in his finger and got a good bite, drawing the blood.

The half-witted man laughed so hearty that he fell on the ground and rolled over.

"My blotter allee samee fool!" declared Hop. "You watchee me! Me allee samee scratch um head!"

He walked up to the cage, and while he was fooling around it he tied a big firecracker so it hung directly beneath it.

"What are yer doin'?" demanded Bill, who liked the parrot about as well as he did anything on the ranch.

"Me allee samee scratch um head," was the reply.

Wing stood at a respectful distance, sucking his bleeding finger and waiting to see what would happen.

"Pletty Polly!" said Hop, as he struck a match and



lighted the fuse of the suspended cracker. "Polly wantee um head scratch?"

Then he stepped back.

When Bill saw what was likely to happen he rushed forward to grab the cracker and throw it away.

He was just about a second too late to get hold of it. Bang!

Bill went one way and the cage the other.

As those who were in the house at the time came rushing out a shrill voice shrieked out from the top of the tree:

"Murder! Injuns! Injuns!"

The bottom of the cage had been knocked out by the explosion, and the parrot had flown to the top of the tree.

The half-witted man got up, not much the worse for his exciting experience, and Hop moved away out of the reach of the ranchman and his wife.

"Whatever is ther matter?" cried Mrs. Robinson. "Where are you, Polly? Come, Polly! Pretty Polly!"

"Ther Chinees blew up ther cage!" said Bill, pointing his finger accusingly at Hop. "He sot off a big fire-cracker, an' it knocked me down when it went off."

Wild did not like the way Hop had acted, and to show the people at the ranch that he wanted to punish him, he drew his revolver and made him do the tenderfoot dance.

When he fired four shots and chipped a piece from both thick soles of the Chinaman's shoes, Mrs. Robinson implored him to desist, declaring that he was surely punished enough.

"All right," declared Wild. "The next time he does anything like that I'll shoot a couple of inches off the end of his pigtail."

The parrot was caught without much trouble and restored to the cage, which was not damaged much, and then our friends went in for dinner.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE RANCHMAN HEARS OF HIS LOSS.

It was a very fine meal that the ranchman's wife served to our friends, and when it was over Wild thought about the cowboys, who had gone after the cattle thieves and the scattered herd.

"It is pretty near time that some of them showed up, boys," he said to Charlie and Jim, as they went out and sat down on the porch. "It might be that they will keep after them until something happens, though. They seemed to be a likely lot of men, and not afraid of anything."

"They won't come back till they git patty nigh all ther cattle, yer kin bet on that!" retorted the scout. "It are too bad that so many of ther steers had ter be killed. Them galoots all needs hangin' or shootin'." I reckon if I git goin' at 'em some of 'em will go under. Ther leader said he was goin' ter trail yer till he got yer, Wild, so that means that we won't have ter look far fur 'em."

"Oh, I haven't the least doubt but that Duck Davis will show up before very long," was the reply. "Well, he will find that he has struck the hottest trail of his life when he gets after me!"

Hop had become very quiet after the parrot incident.

After eating dinner he adjourned to the shade of a neighboring tree, and followed the example of his brother by taking a nap.

The afternoon wore on, and as the sun got down close to the western horizon Young Wild West began to grow restless.

He thought it high time the cowboys came back.

"Boys," said he, "suppose we ride out to meet them? They will surely be coming back by this time."

"A good idea, Wild," answered Dart, while the scout promptly arose and started for the barn.

They found the ranchman there, busy feeding his horses.

"You've got some fine stock, I see," he said, pointing to their horses. "That sorrel stallion looks as though he might be able ter git over ther ground mighty fast."

"Well, he can," answered our hero, looking at Spitfire, his faithful steed, with pride. "I have been in all kinds of races with him, and I never yet found the horse that could keep up with him. I broke him when he was a wild colt of the plains, and since that time he has served me well. I can get more out of him than any one else, too. He knows me as well as a person does, and I can make him do almost anything I say. You have a fine horse there, too, I see."

"Yes; I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for him. He saved my life about a year ago, when I was tackled by a small band of Comanche redskins, who had got full of firewater an' started out ter lift scalps. There wasn't a cayuse that they had what could come anywheres nigh catchin' Kit, which is my broncho's name. They couldn't git close enough ter shoot straight, an' so I got away. That broncho is worth a lot of money, but is worth more ter me than any one else, I s'pose. I don't know what I would do to ther galoot what was ter steal him! I named him after Kit Carson, 'cause he's got a way of doin' his duty, like Kit always had."

It was a fine specimen of Western horseflesh, and our three friends knew it.

But there were plenty that were just as good, and there was no doubt that Young Wild West owned a better one, when it came down to a meaning that was general.

"Where are yer goin'?" asked Robinson, as he saw the three start to saddle their horses.

"Oh, we are going to take a ride out on the range before it gets dark," our hero replied. "You have got a pretty big herd of steers out there, haven't you?"

"Yes, that's right. They're in fine condition, too. I am going to market ther most of them week after next. Yer seen 'em, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yes. We saw them as we rode over. I reckon they got scattered somewhat, for we saw your cowboys going after them to round up the stragglers."

"Got scattered, did they? Why, that is funny. I didn't think ther cattle would leave that fine grazin' they had jest been put on. Ther boys went over ter Shin Holler yesterday, 'cause I thought ther cattle would be all right



till they got back. Somethin' always happens ter go wrong, jest when yer think it is all right."

"Well, we'll ride out and see how the boys have made out," said Wild, not wishing to tell him any more just then, because he had promised Frank Carr that he would not.

The ranchman acted as though he would like to go with them, but as they did not ask him to, he did not.

Mounting their horses, the three rode off for the timber strip.

It was only about a mile wide, and when they got through it they were agreeably surprised to see the herd coming back.

But there was not more than two-thirds of the cattle they had seen rushing through the gully.

The cowboys were coming along behind, and, swinging off to the right, so they would not be apt to frighten the cattle, they rode around until they met them.

"Hello!" called out Wild, as he got within talking distance. "You did pretty well, I see."

"Yes, putty well," answered Carr, the foreman. "We had a putty hot time of it with ther cattle thieves, too. They done their level best ter git away with some of ther steers, an' I s'pose they will manage ter git some of 'em. We found it was no use ter fool with 'em any longer, so we got all we could, an' come back. We'll start out early in ther mornin' an' try an' find some more. A couple of Buck Davis's gang has got rifles, an' they made it look ugly fur us fur a few minutes."

"They shot at you, then?"

"Oh, yes; they shot at us, all right. We shot back, too; but they had ther best of us. We wasn't fools enough ter give 'em a chance ter pick us off, though. There ain't no sense in doin' anything like that. Ther Cowboy Trailer is a bad man, an' he's got ther name of never leavin' a trail till he gits what he's after. But he sorter got ther worst of ther bargain to-day, I reckon."

"Well, you fellows have certainly done well to get together as many of the cattle as you have," our hero observed, nodding with approval. "Where are the cattle thieves now?"

"They're hangin' around," was the reply. "Buck Davis is jest ther kind of a galoot ter look fur satisfaction. He'll keep at it till he gits what he wants, or we git him."

"Well, if he does we'll get him. He threatened to trail me until he got me, so if he tries it I'll guarantee that he won't steal any more cattle when he gets through. I suppose we may as well go back to the ranch now, boys?"

The last was said to Charlie and Jim.

"I reckon so," answered the scout. "Unless yer want ter scout around an' find where ther measly coyotes it."

"No. We'll let the Cowboy Trailer be the aggressor. He said he would keep on my trail till he got me, so let him come on."

"Did yer tell ther boss anything about the stampede?" asked Carr, looking uneasy.

"No. But just as we were leaving the stable I told him that we saw his cattle, and that they were scattered about some. He was surprised to hear that, but he didn't say much."

"Well, it's too bad it happened. But we've done ther

best we could, an' we'll keep on doin' it till we git all ther steers that's runnin' around on ther side of ther mountain. Yer kin speak a word in our favor, if ther boss gits very mad, Young Wild West—that is, if yer feel like doin' it."

"Certainly I'll speak a good word for you. It wasn't your fault that the cattle were stampeded by the scoundrels. The boss knew you were away, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I reckon there won't be any trouble about it. Get the cattle in, and then you can come up and report. We will be there."

"You may as well break ther ice fur us, if yer will," said Carr, after he had thought for a moment.

"All right, then. We'll tell him all about it."

It was getting pretty dark now, so, after glancing back toward the gully, and seeing nothing to indicate that the cattle thieves were following the herd, our three friends left the cowboys and proceeded back to the ranch.

When they got to the house they found that a session of jollity was in progress.

The girls were having a fine time at playing the games Maggie Neal had introduced.

"You are just in time," said the girl from the East, as they came in, after putting away their horses. "We are going to play a game of 'Forfeits,' and there is no fun in it unless there are some of the male gender in it. Fred wouldn't play because he was the only one."

"All right," said Wild. "We will join you right away. I want to tell Mr. Robinson something first."

He called the ranchman into the kitchen, and then the whole story about the cattle stampede and what followed was told to him.

"Stingin' hornets!" exclaimed Robinson. "I knowed somethin' had gone wrong when yer told me that ther steers was scattered. This is what I calls too bad! It ain't ther fault of ther boys, either, fur who would have thought that ther Cowboy Trailer an' his gang was around so close ter here? That galoot is wanted, an' wanted bad! He'll git his medicine yet, if he keeps at his game. Well, there ain't no use in cryin' over spilled milk. I'll make ther best of it. One thing, I s'pose I kin stand ther loss as well as any ranchman in Northwest Texas."

Our friends were glad to see that he took such a view of the case.

They spoke to him reassuringly, and soon the ranchman was over his excitement and waiting for his cowboys to come in.

Then Wild and his partners joined in the game with the girls.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WILD AFTER THE HORSE THIEF.

Bursts of laughter as the game proceeded were many and frequent, and it was not long before the ranchman and his wife were induced to join in the fun.

But when the cowboys arrived Wild and Robinson quit to talk with them, and then something else came up.



Frank Carr was much relieved when he found how the boss looked at the loss of the cattle.

"I'll do my best ter git all that's alive back, boss, an' so will ther rest of ther boys, boss," he declared.

"You can't do no better than that, Frank," Robinson said. "Jest as I told Young Wild West, when he let me know about it, I don't blame you boys a bit. Yer went off ter Shin Holler, an' yer had a good time. When yer come back yer found that ther Cowboy Trailer had got in his work. It was a great scheme of his, an' I'm mighty glad it ain't no worse than it is. I want you an' ther rest of ther boys ter come in an' have a little of ther hard cider I bought down at ther forks last week. I bought two barrel of it fur ther purpose of makin' vinegar out of it, but when I happened ter try it to-day I found it was jest right fur drinkin'. Jest come around as soon as yer git ready."

"All right, Boss Robinson; we'll come," was the delighted man's reply.

The cowboys had quarters of their own in a building about a hundred yards from the house.

They were furnished food by the ranchman, and they cooked it to suit themselves.

Just now one of them, who was taking his weekly turn as cook, was preparing the supper, so Carr hastened away.

It was a little over half an hour when the eight cowboys were in the house, each one having put on a clean shirt and tie. One of them had taken the time to shave.

He stepped out and had their hair combed, and looked in fine fettle.

"I want some cider," the ranchman drew some cider, which was rather strong, and when Cheyenne Charlie tasted it he declared it was a little whisky in it.

"Spec' Robinson was not a teetotaler, and he believed in drinkin' up once in a while."

He was a little surprised when Wild and Jim did not drink any of the cider, after they had smelled of it, but he quickly got some that they were not afraid to drink, and which the girls partook of, too.

"Then no one would have dreamed that a disaster had come to the ranchman's cattle that day, for he drank so much of the cider that he danced, while one of the cowboys sawed away on an old fiddle."

While the fun was in its height Bill, the half-witted man, rushed in and astounded the company by shouting that the stable was on fire.

Out they went, almost falling over each other in an effort to get to the scene.

Sure enough, the barn in which the horses were stalled was in a blaze.

The fire had not gained much headway yet, which showed that Bill must have seen it almost as soon as it started.

All the buckets to be found about the house were filled from the well, and an effort was made to put out the flames.

But Young Wild West and the ranchman thought more about their horses than anything else just then, and they reached the burning barn in a jiffy.

As they neared the blazing structure they heard the sounds of hoofbeats, and then, in the bright glare, they

distinguished the forms of a horse and rider making off to the north.

"Stop, Jake Cotton!" screamed the ranchman, excitedly. "I know yer! Come back with my horse! I'll fix yer fur this, you scoundrel!"

Wild did not know the man, but he was pretty certain that it was one of the cowboys he had seen with Buck Davis.

A derisive laugh came from the man, and then he was lost in the gloom.

Wild knew that the only way to overtake him was to get his horse out of the burning barn.

He rushed in, leaving Robinson almost frantic with rage and fear.

Luckily, the fire had not started very close to the stable part; it was a pile of old hay that had been lighted by the scoundrel, and, with great coolness, the dashing young deadshot untied the terrified animals and ran them outside.

He led his own out last, carrying his saddle with him.

"You can put out the fire, boys," he said, as Charlie and Jim rushed up. "Just soak the hay over there. I am going after the guloot who just made off on the boss's horse."

Wild soon had his noble steed ready to mount.

Then he waited a moment and saw the cowboys coming with the water, and, springing into the saddle, rode off.

"Don't let Jake Cotton git away with my Kit!" shouted the ranchman. "Git ther horse, an' I'll never forgit yer, Young Wild West!"

Our hero meant to do it all right, but he was pretty sure that the broncho was a very speedy one, and that meant that he had a long chase through the darkness on hand.

He never once stopped to think that there might be more of the cattle thieves near by, but rode off with the speed of the wind.

The sorrel stallion seemed to know that an extra effort was required of him, for he went at a swinging gallop, without the least bit of urging.

The moon came up and shed out a flow of silvery light just as Wild was within about two miles of the timber strip.

Then he saw the indistinct forms of the horse and rider he was pursuing.

Even if he had his trusted Winchester with him, the boy would not have taken a shot at the man.

That was not his way.

He would not shoot a horse thief, even, while he was fleeing from him.

"I'll get him!" he muttered, clenching his teeth. "The only chance he has to beat me is to get to his companions. But Frank Carr said they were camped at the other end of the gully somewhere. If they have not moved this way I ought to get him. On, Spitfire! Let yourself go!"

The sorrel responded instantly.

But Wild soon saw the fugitive horse thief disappear in the woods, and then he could not tell how much he was gaining.



If the villain was not aware of the fact that he was being pursued, it might be easier to overhail him.

The boy now looked back.

The flames were no longer to be seen, and he felt relieved on that score.

His partners and the cowboys had succeeded in saving the barn.

Then he rode up to the woods and started through it on the regular cattle trail, which the fugitive had taken.

The villain was too far ahead for him to hear the hoofbeats of the stolen horse, but he knew he must be steadily gaining, so he kept on.

The sorrel was just getting warmed up to his work now, and the way he covered the ground would have opened the eyes of the average man of the plains.

Once through the woods and Wild was able to see his man again.

He was less than a quarter of a mile ahead, and riding furiously.

The light from the full moon illumined the scene for a long distance, and there was nothing in sight but the blue hills at the other end of the grass-covered gully.

Steadily the sorrel lessened the distance between him and the ranchman's much-loved horse.

But Wild was not surprised at this.

He knew that no horse he had ever seen could hold its own with Spittire.

The miles were covered, and just as Wild was beginning to think of making a final spurt to catch up with the horse thief the villain reached the wide mouth of the gully.

He rode over to the right and was almost immediately lost in the dark shadow.

Wild kept right on, however, not turning to the right.

He knew the man was aware that he was being pursued now, and that meant that he might possibly lay for him in ambush.

When Wild rode into the gully, which was about a hundred yards wide at the mouth, he slackened the speed of his horse a little.

It had been a terrific pace, and he knew the sorrel needed a chance to recover his wind.

He had not covered more than a couple of hundred yards when a voice called out of the darkness on the right:

"Here I am, Buck! I thought by the way you was ridin' that some one was after yer, so I didn't slack up none. I thought Robinson's horse was a wonder, but you was gradually catchin' up ter me. I never seen yer ride so fast afore, Buck."

Wild quickly turned his horse and rode toward the spot the voice came from.

The villain had mistaken him for Buck Davis!

Now was his chance to catch him.

A few seconds later he came upon him.

Jake Cotton, the man who had accompanied the Cowboy Trailer to Parrot Ranch, had dismounted, and he now stood holding the stolen horse by the bridle.

"Hands up, you scoundrel!" exclaimed the young deadshot, as he halted before him. "I reckon you've made a little mistake."

"Young Wild West!" gasped the villain, and then, let-

ting go the bridle rein, he bolted for the bushes that grew upon the sloping side of the gully.

Crack!

A flash came from the bushes, and, with a cry that was almost human, Ranchman Robinson's horse leaped forward and fell to the ground!

"Yer had yer chance for nothin', Young Wild West!" came from the bushes, and then a scrambling noise told that the villain was making his escape.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ALMOST A WINNER WILD IS BAFFLED.

Part of the plans laid down by Buck Davis had been carried out to perfection.

The scoundrel had reached the ranch with Jake Cotton without being perceived.

But the fact that the cowboys were in the house, making merry at the time, enabled them to do this.

Buck sneaked up to the house and took the risk of looking through a window at the merry crowd within.

Then he went back to where Jake was waiting, and said:

"Now, then, you sneak over to the stable an' git ther horse yer want. Then set ther blamed barn afire an' light out. I'll wait fur a chance ter git a shot. Yer Wild West. Then I'll come along an' fetch 'em away from me."

"All right," his companion said. "Yer kin be ther right horse! I don't believe there is a man that fol-

He was right on this, for Bill, the half-witted fellow, was in the kitchen just then, getting a share of the

But he came out and saw the blaze just after it started, as the reader knows.

The Cowboy Trailer was waiting for those in the house to rush out, but they came sooner than he expected, and as Young Wild West went out by the front way, he failed to get the opportunity he wanted.

He thought it no place for him, so he withdrew to where the two horses had been left, and then he saw his man ride off.

But when he saw Young Wild West start after him soon after he gave a chuckle of delight.

"I'm on ther young galoot's trail now!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "I'll soon show him what kind of a trailer I am! I'll run him down, an' afore I put an end ter him I'll let him know all about it. Bully! Jake is goin' ter git away all right! An' that barn will burn ter ashes, unless I'm mighty mistaken!"

He mounted his own horse, and, leading the one Jake had ridden over to the ranch, he set out on the trail of the dashing young deadshot.

It was a case of the trailer being trailed just then, and the villain felt delighted when he thought of it.

But Buck soon found that he could not keep up with our hero.

He was left so far behind when the boy reached the timber that he could not tell which way he went.

But he knew that it was more than likely that Jake



would stick to the cattle trail, so he kept on as fast as he could get the horses to go.

His own mount was a pretty good one, but the one Jake had ridden was lame and did not amount to much.

But the cattle thieves had no extra horses, so he stuck to the animal, so it could be kept for a case of emergency.

As the miles were covered Buck grew a little bit uneasy. It occurred to him that it might be that Young Wild West would overtake Jake before he got to the camp.

And if he did it would probably go hard with him.

He swore at the lagging horse he was leading and managed to get along a little faster, though it was not the swearing that accomplished it, by any means.

When he was yet a mile away from the mouth of the gulch he heard a shot fired.

Then all was still again.

"I wonder what that meant?" he asked himself. "Was it Young Wild West what fired, or was it Jake?"

He knew very well if it was the boy Jake had probably got his medicine.

But if it was Jake it was hard to tell, for he was nothing much on shooting accurate.

Buck kept on, determined to find out what the shot meant.

He held a revolver in his hand now, and when he came close to the mouth of the hollow between the hills he slowed down to a walk.

He proceeded until suddenly he came upon a man.

He stopped and came to a halt instantly.

There was no rider about, and it dawned upon him that "I was a fool."

He mounted, and the moment he did he heard some one shouting down the steep hill that was close by.

"Spec! Young Wild West!"

He had started after the escaping villain, hoping to catch him and take him back to the ranch a prisoner.

The boy felt as though he ought to shoot him on sight, for it was a dastardly act when he shot the horse.

But Jake knew more about the lay of the land than he did, and he got away, or else remained in hiding.

He was coming back just in time to fall into the trap of the Cowboy Trailer.

"I'll get you," he muttered, and he drew the revolver he held in his hand.

He was struck to the ground, and then a voice called out:

"Well, you're a fool, Young Wild West! Ther Cowboy Trailer is yer down!"

At the same moment the muzzle of a six-shooter was pressed under his nose!

Young Wild West never did anything that was foolhardy.

He realized instantly that he had been caught, and he decided to give in.

He recognized the voice of the villain, who had surprised him, and he was satisfied that he would as leave kill him as not.

"You've got me," he said, coolly. "I'll give in!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Buck, in triumph. "Now, tell me where my pard is, or I'll kill yer right where yer stand!"

"He got away up there somewhere," was the reply. "I tried hard to find him, but I couldn't."

"Yer lie! Yer shot him!"

"No, I didn't shoot him. It was he who fired the shot. He killed the horse he stole, just for spite. I'll bet the ranchman will make him suffer for it, too, for he thought an awful lot of that horse."

"Where's ther horse he shot?"

He had not seen the slain animal yet, for it lay in a shadow, a few yards away.

"There it is, right over there," and Wild nodded in the direction.

Then it was that Buck got off his guard. He looked in the direction indicated.

That was the opportunity Wild wanted.

As quick as a flash he struck the weapon from the villain's hand and grappled with him.

Buck was a powerful man, but he was no match for the athletic boy in a scrimmage of that kind.

Before he scarcely realized what happened he struck the ground on his head and shoulders.

"I reckon I'll have things my way now!" he said, coolly, as he drew his other revolver and placed the muzzle against the forehead of his foe.

Buck was not going to give in, however.

He made a desperate attempt to get upon his feet, and seeing that he was not afraid of being shot, Wild grappled with him again.

He did not want to shoot the villain, but meant to take him a prisoner.

Biff!

The athletic boy struck him a blow between the eyes that sent him staggering.

But Buck stood the blow remarkably well and reached for the other six-shooter he had in his belt.

Wild sprang forward and knocked it from his hand.

"No, you don't!" he exclaimed. "You are going with me. I've got you, and I'm going to take you, dead or alive, to Parrot Ranch!"

"No, yer ain't!" cried a voice from behind him, and then Jake came running down the hill from the place where he had been concealed all the time.

Wild jumped aside to escape the rush of the second villain, and with a bound Buck was upon the back of his horse.

Then Jake showed how much of a coward he was.

He darted back into the bushes, and up the slope he went.

Wild was angered at the way things had turned out.

Meanwhile Buck was riding away as fast as his horse could go, the other horse following him.

"Outwitted, after all!" exclaimed the young deadshot, as he took his horse by the bridle. "There is no use in following the Cowboy Trailer, for it is likely that the rest of the gang is close by. And as for the other fellow, he can easily clude me in the bushes up there. I reckon I'll go back to the ranch. To-morrow we will see who comes out at the top of the heap."

Mounting the sorrel stallion, he turned and rode off in the direction of the ranch.

When he was about two hundred feet from the spot a mocking laugh rang out from the side of the hill.



"All right, you scoundrel!" the boy called out. "You won't laugh when Robinson gets hold of you. He'll make you suffer for killing his horse, and you can bet on that!"

"He'll have ter catch me first!" came the tantalizing reply.

"It would be sheer folly to go on after Buck Davis," he thought. "I would simply be putting myself right in the hands of the villains. I'll wait until morning, and then I reckon something will be done."

## CHAPTER X.

### HOP'S JOKE WITH BILL.

When Wild got back to the ranch he found that the fire had been extinguished with a small loss.

But Robinson was in a state of feverish excitement.

"Didn't yer git him?" he asked, as he ran up to the boy, who was talking to Cheyenne Charlie, who was the first to greet him on his return.

"No, Mr. Robinson; I didn't get him," was the reply. "I struck a streak of bad luck."

"He got away with Kit, then? Oh, that's too bad!"

"You'll never see Kit alive again, Mr. Robinson. The cowardly galoot shot him."

"What!"

The ranchman sprang back and held his hands to his head in a dazed sort of way.

"That's right. I had him dead to rights, when he leaped into the bushes and then shot the horse. I couldn't find him, search as I might, and when I gave it up I ran right into the Cowboy Trailer, and we had a big tussle. I would have had him, too, but the other fellow turned up again and spoiled it. Then they both got away."

Robinson became suddenly calm.

"Jake Cotton shot Kit, then?" he asked, after remaining silent for a moment.

"Yes. It happened just as I have told you."

"All right! Next ter my wife, I thought more of that horse than anything in ther world. I've always been known as an honest, lawabidin' man; but I'm out fur revenge now, an' I want everybody ter know it. Jest as sure as ther sun will rise an' set to-morrer, I'll have revenge on that galoot! I'll catch him an' drag him a mile over ther prairie behind a horse! I'll make him wish he'd never been born, ther thierin' coward! Ter shoot an innocent horse what was as good as gold, an' had saved my life! Oh, but I'll make him suffer fur it!"

"I don't blame you a bit, Mr. Robinson," said Wild, taking him by the arm and leading him to the house. "I'll help you catch him."

"I know yer will, Young Wild West. I'm glad yer didn't shoot him, 'cause if yer had I wouldn't have no chance ter git my revenge. It won't bring Kit back ter life, but it will soothe me a little if I kin only git him."

The jolly time at the ranch had been broken up when the fire was discovered, and there was no likelihood of its being resumed now, for Robinson felt so bad over the loss of his favorite horse that an air of solemnity prevailed.

Our hero talked it over with his partners and the cowboys, and it was decided that they should leave the ranch in the morning and hunt down the cattle thieves.

All hands retired a little earlier than they would have done had not the startling events just narrated happened.

We say all hands, but there were two exceptions.

They were Hop Wah and the simple-minded fellow called Bill.

Bill had got hold of a little more of the ranchman's cider than was good for him, and his dull wits brightened to such an extent that he began to think he was some importance.

Hop had taken more than his share of the cider, too, for he had managed to steal a tin pail of it.

He also found the ranchman's whisky jug, and he had made what was in the pail much stronger than it was before.

Both the Chinamen were assigned to sleep in a little outhouse with Bill, and Wing, like the good Chinaman he was, lost no time in turning in.

But Hop and Bill had the tin pail of strong cider there, and they did not mean to go to sleep until they drank it up.

"They say I'm a fool," said Bill, as they sat on the floor of the little shanty in the light of a dimly burning lantern, "but I ain't! I'm ther son of a squire that was ther smartest man in ther western part of Maine, an' I ain't no fool. My brain sharpens up when I git a drink in me. Do yer think I look like a fool?"

He stared at the Celestial in an idiotic way.

"You no lookee likee fool," Hop answered, as he then

the two cups they had full of the cider. "Y-allee samee likee velly muchee smartee man,"

"He, he, he!"

Bill was tickled to hear this.

"I know you're a smart Chinese," he observed, thoughtfully. "Any one as kin make an old jackknife turn inter a live mouse is bound ter be smart. I wish I was as smart as you are."

"Me makee you allee samee velly muchee smarter," said Hop, who was in a joking humor. "You dew to samee I say and you gittee allee light in um uppeaw his so be."

"I'll do it!" exclaimed the poor fellow, eager after him tell me what it is, Hop. Go on, Hop—that's

ler!"

"Allee light," was the reply. "Dlinkee Hop of a cidee and tanglefoot; len me showee you whattoe an end Bill drained the whole cupful at a single gulp, like a

Hop took his time about emptying his, and the grew impatient.

"Will I git as sensible as any one else?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Hop, thoughtfully. "You gittee allee samee smartee likee lillee jackee-aaa with um biggee ears."

The half-witted fellow looked as though he did not quite comprehend.

"Will I git as sensible as Mister Robinson is?" he queried. "Yer know how it is with me, Hop? Some times I think I'm all right. I kin look 'way back an' remember when I was a little boy playin' with ther children in my native village. My heart stops beatin' then, an



someh' begins ter jump in my head. Then I have ter laugh. He, he, he!"

It was really pathetic to hear the poor fellow talk, but Hop was not possessed of a great deal of sentiment.

Anyhow, he was under the influence of very strong cider, and his only thought was to have some fun with Bill, and incidentally with those in the house.

"You comee outee here," he said, taking Bill by the collar and leading him out of the shanty. "You see lat biggee chimney on um house?"

"Yes, I see it," the man said, rubbing his eyes and looking at it in a vague sort of way. "I cleaned it out last week with a cedar brush."

"Um pretty biggee chimney inside, so be."

"Yes, big enough fur a feller ter drop down, if he wanted ter."

"Well, me gottee uncle in China whatee velly muchee smartee. He allee samee pretty muchee fooler one time. But he go to um house like his, where um havee velly biggee chimney, and len he allee samee dlop down um chimney. He havee lats in his gallet before he dlop down um chimney, but when he gittee allee samee down um lats allee gone. You gittee on um house velly easy, and you dlop down um chimney! You comee down allee samee velly muchee smartee, so be."

Poor Bill was just fool enough, and just drunk enough, to believe this.

He did not wait a second, but ran and got a short ladder, and reached up to the roof of the house.

He stepped up as softly as a cat, Hop watching him with interest.

"I want in the roof, Bill crawled to the top and got to say that they."

A hundred feet his feet and legs, and, without pausing a second, let himself drop.

It happened that Wild, Jim and Fred Martin had been assigned to the room the outlet of the chimney was in, and they had just dropped off to sleep when the half-witted man dropped down the chimney.

He came down swiftly, bringing a lot of soot with him, and out into the room he bounced like a rubber ball!

It being dark there, Wild struck a match, holding a twinkle in the other hand at the same time.

"Be up to me—Bill!" said a choking voice. "Hop told me 'I'll give you a feller ter drop down, if he wanted ter.'"

"I'll give you a feller ter drop down, if he wanted ter," said it would make me smart."

Again, who burst into a laugh.

Bill could not help it, for the fellow looked comical as black as the ace of spades, and as he arose the next feet he looked more simple than ever.

Of course, the noise had aroused everybody in the house.

The ranchman hurried to the room, followed by Cheyenne Charlie.

"What's ther matter, Wild?" the scout asked.

"Nothing, only Bill jumped down the chimney, because Hop told him to," was the reply.

Robinson held up the lantern he carried and took a look at the soot-covered man.

"Is that you, Bill?" he asked.

"Yes, Mister Robinson; it's me," was the reply. "An' I feel jest about as simple as I ever did. I guess ther

Chinee lied ter me, or else it won't work on me ther same as it did his uncle."

It took some little time to quiet those in the house and make them understand what it was all about.

When they did understand there was considerable smiling done, and in some cases bursts of laughter.

Poor Bill went back to the shanty and found Hop apparently sound asleep.

He shook his head sadly, and then went outside and removed his clothing and took a wash.

"I'll tell him about it in ther mornin'," he said, speaking aloud. "Maybe he kin tell me someh' else that will put some sense in me."

Cheyenne Charlie woke up laughing two or three times that night, and in the morning he told Wild that making Bill come down the chimney was the funniest thing Hop had ever done.

"Yes," was the reply. "But that was going a little too far with the poor fellow. He has got to stop it."

## CHAPTER XL

### THE DEMIJOHN OF WHISKY.

As soon as the villain named Jake heard Young Wild West riding away he crept out of the hole he had been hiding in and came down the slope.

"I reckon Young Wild West didn't git much satisfaction out of that," he muttered. "I wouldn't have shot ther cayuse if it hadn't been that I found that ther boy's was faster than it. Then I jest made up my mind that any horse what couldn't go fast enough ter git a feller away ought ter be shot, 'specially when it is a stolen horse. There was a good deal of satisfaction in doin' it, too, 'cause Young Wild West was chasin' me ter git ther horse. Well, now I'll foot it on after Buck. Most likely I'll meet him comin' back in a minute or two."

He did meet the leader of the cattle thieves in just about that time.

The Cowboy Trailer was leading the extra horse, and when Jake saw it he gave a nod of satisfaction.

"I'm here, Buck," he said. "It was a lively time, wasn't it?"

"That's right, Jake," was the reply. "Did yer pick up my shooters?"

"No, I never thought about it. I've got mine, though."

"Well, I'm goin' back there ter see if I kin find mine. They're too good ter let lay there, I reckon. That young galoot sartainly was handlin' me when you let out that yell. I've got a nice little lump on my forehead what his fist done, an' yer kin bet all you're worth that I'll git square with ther galoot afore ther lump goes down! I'm goin' after him ther first thing in ther mornin'."

"He'll be after us ther first thing in the mornin', most likely," Jake answered. "I'm putty sartain that Boss Robinson will be after me, anyhow. He set great stock in that horse of his. He'll want ter string me up fur that."

"Well, he'll take it out in wantin', won't he?"

"I reckon he will," and the villain laughed.

They went back to the spot where the revolvers had



been lost, and after a little hunt around they were found. "I thought maybe Young Wild West picked 'em up an' took 'em along with him," said Buck. "If he had we would have been a little short on shooters."

"Oh, I don't know. Ther most of the boys has got two."

"They all ought ter have two. Yer can't tell what minute you're goin' ter lose one, yer know. Jest see me a little while ago! I lost both of mine."

"An' yer would have been ridin' toward Parrot Ranch now, with a rope holdin' your ankles under your cayuse's belly, an' your hands tied behind your back," Jake answered.

"Maybe I would—I won't say I wouldn't have," the Cowboy Trailer admitted, with a shrug of his shoulders. "That boy is sartainly a fighter!"

"Oh, he could lick either one of us in a fight, I reckon. There ain't no use in tryin' ter rub it out."

"I ain't rubbin' it out; but I'll rub him out, though! He's my meat, Jake!"

"All right, Buck. Yer know I'll do all I can ter help yer."

The two were riding up the gully now, for they had had enough of it for one night.

They both agreed that it was better to get after Young Wild West in the daylight.

Reaching the camp, they found the rest of the gang waiting for them with anxiety.

They all wanted to know how they had made out.

It was not much the two had to report, in the way of success.

But Jake elaborated on it so much that he actually made them think that a great thing had been done.

He thought the shooting of the horse crowned the whole thing, but he was about the only one who did.

However, no one said anything to that effect just then.

"Why didn't yer try ter git hold of some whisky while yer was over there?" one of the men asked.

"I never had no time," Buck answered. "Jake got ther barn afire so blamed quick that I had ter git away afore I was seen."

"If I'd been there I'd have got some whisky, I'll bet!"

"Well, you used ter work there, an' you know jest where Robinson keeps it, I s'pose."

"That's right," and the man, whose name was Hench, nodded and grinned. "I worked there ther same time that Jake did."

"But you knowed more about ther house than I did," spoke up Jake.

"Yes, I allow that I did."

"An' yer both quit ther ranch when yer helped me git ther first lot of cattle away from Robinson," said Buck, with a chuckle. "You knowed which was ther most money fur yer, didn't yer?"

"Yer kin bet that I did!" Hench declared.

"Oh, so did I," Jake spoke up. "It weren't no kind of life fur me around that ranch. Ther rest of ther boys was all too honest, anyhow. I'm mighty glad I left."

"But how about ther whisky we was talkin' about?" Hench asked.

"If you want ther liquor why in thunder don't yer go an' git it?" asked Buck. "It's only a little over ten miles

ter ther ranch. You know ther way, an' yer know jest where Robinson keeps his stuff. I reckon they'll all be asleep, so yer oughter be able ter git what yer want an' sneak off with it. If yer don't want ter go don't say nothin' more about it."

"Oh, I ain't afraid ter go all right," answered Hench. "I'll bring back some rum, too, an' don't yer furgit it. Who wants ter go along with me fur company?"

"I do!" spoke up one of the men.

"All right, then. Git your horse ready. You kin stay back with ther horses while I git ther whisky."

The two soon mounted and rode off.

It was a rather long journey to go after whisky, and run the risk of not being able to get it at the same time.

But the ruffianly fellows were tired of hanging around the camp, and they thought nothing of a ten-mile ride, anyhow.

Their horses were pretty fresh, having had a pretty good rest since the cattle stampede, and they were not gone two hours.

When they came back to the camp and the sleepy inmates started to their feet, Hench was holding a demijohn at arm's length.

"What do yer think of that?" he cried. "I reckon I ain't ther one as gits left when I start out after somethin'!"

"Ther whisky was in ther place where they keep ther milk," the other villain hastened to explain. "Hench knowed jest where ter go. It was easy."

"Yer didn't wake no one, then?" queried the leader.

"No; we didn't have ter run ther risk of doin' that. Ther place where ther whisky was is a hole dug in ther side of ther bank that's right back of ther kitchen door. Robinson's wife keeps all her milk an' butter there. Here's some butter I brought over, too."

The villain pointed to a tin pail that was tied to the back of his saddle.

"What good is butter without bread?" Buck asked, shrugging his shoulders.

"We've got some corn meal, ain't we?"

"Yes, half a bag, about."

"Well, I reckon we'll have corn cakes fur breakfast, then. Jest leave it ter me."

"All right. But hein's you got ther whisky, we'll try some of it right now."

It was a two-gallon demijohn that Hench had brought with him, and it was nearly full.

"There was another one there, but there wasn't much in it, an' I didn't think I had time ter pour it out inter this one," he explained. "I reckon here's enough fur us."

"It'll be all we want to-night, anyhow," and Buck took the demijohn.

He soon got a tin cup, and then he took a good swig of the liquor.

"One thing about me, boys, is that I never was very much of a drinker," he remarked, as he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his shirt. "I only drink ther stuff 'cause it makes me feel good. There ain't nothin' about ther taste that I like."

"You ain't like me, then," chuckled Hench, as he took some of the stuff.



The rest seemed to be of the same opinion.

When all had swallowed a share of it the Cowboy Trailer took the demijohn and placed it by his saddle.

"I'll take care of that, boys. Some of yer don't know jest how far ter go with that kind of stuff. We'll need all our wits about us in ther mornin', so we won't drink no more to-night."

"What's a couple of gallons of whisky among twelve men?" spoke up Hensch, who did not seem to like the stand the leader took.

"It would set yer all b'ilin' drunk, that's what it would," was the retort. "I reckon I'm ther leader here, an' things has got ter go ther way I want 'em ter."

Hensch looked around at the men to see how the men took to Buck's idea of it.

He saw that they were anything but pleased.

But he said nothing just then.

"Now," said the Cowboy Trailer, "I reckon we kin turn in an' sleep till daylight."

One by one they sought their blankets, but no one but Buck went to sleep.

Hensch had been busy exchanging glances with the most of them, and they knew what it meant.

Half an hour later he arose, and, while Buck was snoring away, he crawled over and got the demijohn.

Then the rest got up and followed him to a spot about a hundred yards from the camp.

He saw that the villains were going to have the whisky, in spite of their leader.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE START ON THE HUNT FOR THE CATTLE THIEVES.

Robinson was quite calm in the morning.

When he came outside, where Wild and his two partners were standing, he bade them a pleasant "Good morning."

"I reckon yer didn't sleep much, though," he added, a twinkle in his eyes. "What will that Chinese of yours be up to next?"

"I'll guarantee that he won't do anything like that again," Wild retorted. "He went a little too far, and he's got to stop such business."

"Well, I don't blame him a great deal. That fool of a Bill ought ter have knowed better than ther drop down ther climby. I always knowed that he wasn't all there; but ter think that he would be fool enough ter climb on ther roof an' drop down ther climby, jest because ther Chinese told him it would make him sensible! That's ther greatest thing I ever heard of! I wonder where Bill is now? Let's go to the shanty an' see if he's awake yet."

Knowing that the two Chinamen were there, our friends were quite ready to go.

Robinson opened the door softly and looked in.

All three of the inmates were asleep yet.

The tin pail, with a little of the cider in it, was on the floor, just as they had left it, and when the ranchman saw it he gave a nod.

"I reckon they wasn't satisfied with what they had in ther house," he said. "That's jest like that fool Bill."

"An' it's jest like that heathen, Hop," added Cheyenne Charlie. "I'll bet he was at ther bottom of that!"

Just then Wing awoke.

Seeing them in the shanty, he promptly got up.

But Hop and the half-witted man slept on.

The drop down the chimney had not disturbed the slumbers of the victim of the clever Celestial, it seemed.

But the fact was that they had drunk so much of the doctored cider that they had become stupefied.

Wing bowed politely, and then hurried out.

"I reckon I'd better wake up ther other two, eh, Wild?" said the scout.

"Yes; go on, Charlie," was the reply.

Out came the revolver of the scout.

The roof had plenty of holes in it, so it made no matter if a couple more were there.

Crack—crack!

He fired twice in quick succession.

Hop jumped up quick as a flash, but Bill only moved uneasily and dropped off into slumber again.

"Whatter matter?" asked Hop, as he rubbed his eyes and looked around. "Me tinkee cattle thieves come!"

"Yer did, hey?" observed Charlie. "Well, you'll think somethin' worse than cattle thieves has struck yer if yer don't look out! Light out of here an' wash up."

"Allee light, Misler Charlie. Velly nicee morning, so be."

With a bland smile, the clever fellow passed out, just managing to dodge a kick that was aimed at him.

"I reckon we'd better let that galoot sleep; he looks putty tired," Charlie said, nodding at the form of Bill.

"All right," answered the ranchman, as he went out and looked at the chimney. "I reckon he won't try anything like he did last night very soon ag'in."

By this time the rest were up and stirring.

As Robinson walked to the kitchen door his wife came out and went to the little cellar that had been dug in the side of the bank.

The next minute a cry of surprise came from her.

"Some one has took all ther butter I had made up!" she said, excitedly.

"What's that?" and Robinson hastened to investigate.

He looked around and found that the butter was gone, sure enough.

"An' two of my tin pails is gone, too," the woman declared.

"Well, I jest seen one of 'em. It was Bill an' that funny Chinese what took that. They was after ther cider. Why, hello! One of ther demijohns is gone, an' it's ther full one, yer might be sure! Say, but this is gittin' worse!"

It was only natural that our friends should lay the whole thing to Hop.

Wild quickly brought him to the place.

"Now, then, what did you do with the butter you took from here last night?" he demanded, sternly.

"Me no takee butter, Misler Wild," was the reply. "Me takee allee samee tin pail an' lillee tanglefoot; lat all."

Our hero could always tell whether the Chinaman was telling the truth or not.

He now knew that he was telling the truth.



But it looked that way, and he questioned him closely for a few minutes.

But the result was the same.

Hop stoutly denied any knowledge of the missing butter, pail and demijohn.

"Mr. Robinson," our hero said, "he didn't touch the butter and demijohn. He is a sort of thief sometimes, I know; but he is innocent of this."

"I'll take your word for it, Wild," was the reply. "It must have been Bill what took it. He likes butter putty well."

"Bill no takes," declared Hop, who was really as much mystified as any of them.

"Are you sure he didn't, Hop?" Wild questioned, sharply.

"Me velly sure."

"He didn't do it, Mr. Robinson, and I am positive that Wing didn't. There has been some one else here."

"Some one else?"

"It certainly looks that way. I don't know what else to say."

"Who could have done it, then?"

"Well, it must have been the Cowboy Trailer and his man, when they were sneaking around here before the barn was set afire."

"Great gimlets!" exclaimed the scout. "I never thought of that. Sartinly it was them!"

"That explains it, I guess," spoke up Jim.

"Yes," said the ranchman, "that's how it was, then. Ther thievin' galoots! But jest wait! I'll git Jake Cotton, an' I'll drag him over the prairie till I've satisfied my revenge! He killed my poor horse, an' I'll kill him by inches!"

The old man became furious then, for the incident was uppermost in his mind again.

"See here," said Wild, taking him by the arm in a persuasive way. "Don't get excited over it. You need to be cool, and keep cool, if you expect to catch the scoundrel. Just take it easy now."

Robinson checked his anger and looked at the young dead-shot.

"I guess you're right," he said. "I'll try ter keep cool. But I'm a revengeful man, I am. There ain't no use in sayin' I ain't. If anybody does me a wrong I never feel right till I've had my revenge. Jake Cotton has done me a great wrong, an' he must suffer for it!"

"All right. Just wait till you get him."

"The old man means business, I guess," said Jim, as the ranchman went in the house. "I never saw a more earnest one than he is. When he says he is of a vengeful nature he surely speaks the truth."

"Well, we will have to let him have his way about it, I suppose," our hero answered. "Of course, I don't mean to allow him to kill the man by inches if he gets him in his power."

They were soon called to breakfast, and the sun was just showing above the range to the east when they came out.

"Are you goin', too, pop?" asked the ranchman's wife, as she saw him slipping an extra shooter in his belt.

"Yes, Mary," was the reply. "I'm goin' ter help look

fur ther rest of ther cattle, an' ter git ther man what killed Kit. I'll come back 'all right."

The woman said no more.

She knew him better than any one there, and it was evident she was quite sure that it would be useless to say anything contrary to his wishes.

The cowboys were called, and in a few minutes they were all mounted and ready.

There being eight of them, the party numbered just twelve—the same as that of the cattle thieves.

"There'll be some lead ter fly afore we git back, or I'll miss my guess!" the scout exclaimed, as they rode away.

Hop watched them as they rode for the woods, and then he shook his head.

"Me velly muchee solly me makee Misler Wild allee sancee mad," he muttered. "Me likee do somethin' to makee him glad, so be. Me go und lookee for um cattle thieves, too!"

Bent on squaring himself, she Celestial went to the barn.

Bill was there, and he looked simple enough when the Chinaman smiled and wished him good morning.

"You takee lillee dlop too muchee last night, Misler Bill," he added.

"I reckon I did," was the reply. "Say! But ain't my head thick, though?"

"You allee light from um head uppee," said the Chinaman.

Bill looked puzzled at this remark.

"Where are yer goin'?" he ventured to say, "for he saw the Celestial saddling the piebald broncho he always rode."

"Me takee lillee lide on um plairie," was the reply. "Me shootee three or four cattle thieves, pretty soonee."

"Say, but you're awful smart, Hop!"

"You jumpee down um chimney some more an' you be velly muchee smartee."

"Well, I must have been putty smart ter do it without breakin' my neck. He, he, he!" and Bill laughed in his foolish way.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE COWBOY TRAILER READY TO TAKE THE TRAIL.

The Cowboy Trailer's men no sooner got to drinking the whisky when they began to grow reckless, and in half an hour from the time the demijohn was taken they were ready to dance and sing.

Nearly every drop of the liquor had been swallowed this time, and they seemed to forget all about their sleeping leader.

Finally one of them broke into a song, and then it was that the rest threw aside all reserve and joined in.

Buck was sleeping soundly, but that noise was bound to awaken most any one.

He got up and, finding the camp deserted, listened for a moment.

Then he looked at the place where he had put the demijohn.

He knew then what had happened.



His men had stolen the whisky, after he had decreed that no more should be drunk that night.

That was enough!

He did not fly into a passion, but, coolly tightening his belt, he started for the scene of the revel.

The villains had lighted a lantern, which was hung to the branch of a tree, and they were getting in at a lively rate.

Buck strode right among them, but that did not stop them, for the majority of them were in a muddled condition, and they cared for nothing just then.

Buck saw the demijohn and he quickly took hold of it and weighed it in his hand.

"See here!" he exclaimed. "What are you fellows up to, anyhow? Does it mean that you're done with me?"

They stopped their antics and looked at him with drunken gravity.

"Yer can't—hic—blame us, Buck," answered Hench, trying to brace up and reason it out. "We felt like havin' a little spree an' you didn't want us to, that's all. We'll be all right in the mornin', an' then we'll fight fur yer to the last ditch. Ain't that right, boys?"

"You bet!" came the reply in a roar of voices.

"Three cheers fur the Cowboy Trailer, the man that no galoot kin down!" shouted Jake.

The cheers had been given in a way that showed they meant it, but Buck was not satisfied.

He had been disobeyed, and he felt that he would lose prestige among them if he dropped the matter.

He stepped back against a tree and pulled a revolver from his belt.

"I want ter know if there's any one here who dares ter say that I ain't the boss of this gang!" he exclaimed.

A hush came over the tipsy crowd.

"Speak out!" he roared. "I'm ready ter shoot."

"There ain't no one as wants ter go ag'in yer, Buck," said Jake, shrugging his shoulders. "Hench jest told yer how it was. We're all with yer, through thick an' thin. We like whisky a little better than you do, that's all."

The Cowboy Trailer was partly satisfied.

There was not one of them who dared to go against him, and that meant that he was still boss—when there was no whisky around, anyhow.

"All right," he said; and then he turned to the empty demijohn and fired a shot at it.

The jingling of the glass inside the wickerwork seemed to satisfy him fully, and, without another word, he turned and walked back to the camp.

Soon after that the men began staggering back to their blankets, and in an hour all were sound asleep.

Buck was up with the sun, but he found he had a job on hand to arouse his men.

But when he finally got Jake wide awake it was easier, and soon the breakfast was under way.

Hench kept his word and made the corn cakes, and, with plenty of broiled beef and coffee, the villains had what might be termed a feast.

The butter went good with the corn cakes, and it disappeared quickly enough.

When the meal was over with Buck gave the word to saddle the horses.

"It's sartin sure that Young Wild West will be after us this mornin', so we'll light out an' work it so we'll be after him. He'll head fur the gully, most likely," he said.

"An' you mean ter let him come on through with his gang, while we drop in behind 'em an' foller 'em—is that it, Buck?" asked Jake.

"Sartin! Ain't I the Cowboy Trailer? Ain't it my business ter foller the galoot I want ter git, instead of havin' him on my trail? I reckon I know my business all right; an' I'm bound ter keep up my reputation, too."

"That's it!" cried Hench, and the rest joined in with their approbation.

"We'll jest strike out along the side of the ridge an' git down to the mouth of the gully. Ther chances is that they'll stop where the dead horse lays. We'll wait on the hill, among the trees, an' watch 'em."

Then they rode off to the left, making sure to keep under cover of the thick growth of trees that lined the side of the mountain, but not getting very far away from the gully.

After a while they came out near the end of it, but they did not risk riding into the open.

"Dismount, boys," said Buck, and they did so.

"Now, then, Jake, where is the place?"

"Come on," was the reply. "Yer kin lead the horses right up close ter where I was hidin' last night when Young Wild West was lookin' fur me."

They moved along through the woods and soon reached a spot from which they could look down to the mouth of the gully and the plain beyond.

It so happened that their delay in starting brought them there just in time to see our friends approaching.

The villains showed signs of uneasiness when they had counted the party, for they realized that they were even up, as far as numbers went.

But they all knew that Young Wild West was equal to three or four himself, and that made them uneasy.

"Sorter looks as though they meant business, eh, Buck?" observed Jake, scratching his head, thoughtfully.

"Yes, sorter that way," was the reply. "But jest wait! We'll catch the galoots where their hair is short, all right."

"There's old man Robinson with 'em," Jake remarked, a minute later. "He's lookin' fur me about the horse, I reckon. I wouldn't want him ter catch me, if I hadn't no show. He's got an awful temper, an' he did think an awful lot of that blamed horse."

"There ain't any doubt but that he'll pump lead inter yer if he gits the chance, Jake. But yer mustn't let him git the chance."

"I don't intend ter. I'm goin' ter shoot him first, if I kin!"

"Are we goin' ter let 'em have it from here, Buck?" one of the men asked.

"No; that wouldn't hardly do. We're cattle thieves, an' it's our business ter let 'em shoot at us first. Young Wild West is the only one in the gang that I want. I want ter git him alive, an' then I'll show him that he don't amount ter nothin'. I'll put him out of the way, after I've talked ter him a while. We'll let 'em go right on past, an' then we'll take the trail."



It was not long before the party rode up.

As Buck had said, they came direct to the spot where the horse had been shot by Jake.

They saw the old ranchman dismount and fall upon the dead body, and they could all tell that he was shedding tears over the slain steed.

"He must have thought an awful lot of ther nag," said one.

Jake's face was pale now.

It no doubt occurred to him that a man who showed so much affection for a horse would be terribly in earnest about seeking his revenge.

After a while the party rode on up the gully.

"Now, then, we'll ride on down an' take ther trail," said Buck. "Young Wild West will be in my power afore two hours, see if he ain't!"

It was evident by the way the men acted that some of them had their doubts about this.

But they did not say anything contradictory, however, and rode on down to the open prairie.

They had barely got there when they observed a solitary horseman following the trail of Young Wild West's party.

"Another one comin', eh?" said the Cowboy Trailer. "Git back among ther trees, boys! We'll catch him when he comes along. He may be of some use ter us."

It was a pretty sure thing that they had not been observed by the approaching horseman, for they were barely out of the timber when they saw him coming.

The dark background the trees made would make them less apt to be seen, anyhow.

On came the horseman, and the cattle thieves, waiting in the shadow of the timber, watched him as he gradually drew nearer.

"It's a Chinnee!" Jake exclaimed, after a pause. "One of Young Wild West's Chinamen is follerin' 'em up."

"All right. Anything that belongs ter Young Wild West I'm ready ter take jest now," answered Buck. "I'll take ther Chinnee!"

It was Hop coming, of course.

He had not seen the villains, either, and he was riding right into a trap.

But one thing about the clever Chinaman was that when he got into a trap he generally found a way to get out.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### HOP AND THE CATTLE THIEVES.

Hop had seen the party ahead of him as they rode into the opening between the two long, sloping hills, and he had slowed down until they were out of sight.

Then he let his broncho go at a stiff gallop.

He came right along, and finally, just as he was going into the mouth of the gully, he received a surprise.

Out of the woods came the cattle thieves, and before he could get a chance to flee they were right upon him.

They did no shouting, however, for they did not want to attract the attention of Young Wild West and his friends.

Hop reined in his broncho and allowed them to surround him.

He was quick to recover from a surprise, and he was thinking, even then, of a way to outwit the villains.

He recognized them, of course, for he had seen them plainly the day before.

"Whattée mattée?" he asked, smiling serenely. "You allee samce velly muchee excitee, so be."

"There ain't no one here what's excited, you heathen galoot!" retorted Buck Davis, with a chuckle. "You're a putty cool sort of a galoot, fur a heathen, I reckon."

"Me lounnee floss Young Wild West," Hop answered, quickly.

"Oh! Yer did, eh? Well, we'll soon take some of ther coolness out of yer, I reckon. So you're Young Wild West's Chinnee, are yer?"

"Yes, so be; me allee samce velly muchee smartee."

The men laughed, for they were not used to hearing Chinamen talk that way.

They did not offer to seize and bind him, so Hop felt pretty easy.

He had no sign of a weapon upon him, though he really had an old-fashioned six-shooter and a hunting knife under his gown-like coat.

"Where was yer going?" Buck demanded, trying to look fierce and strike terror to the Celestial's heart.

"Me takee lillee hide to fly and findee um cattle thieves, so be."

The reply astonished the questioner.

But Hop was telling the truth, for he thought it would suit just then.

He knew very well that the men considered him as about next to nothing, and that was why he meant to give it to them straight from the shoulder.

"So yer wanted ter find ther cattle thieves, eh? Well, you've fond 'em; now what are yer goin' ter do about it?"

"Me havee lillee talkee."

"You will have a little talk, eh? Well, go ahead, then. You can talk, an' then we'll show yer how we use a heathen Chinnee what starts out ter find cattle thieves."

Hop knew he was in a desperate situation, but he retained his coolness.

Pulling a pack of cards from his pocket, he said:

"Me showee um cattle thieves nicee lillee tick."

"We don't want ter see none of your tricks," spoke up Jake. "Buck, if you're goin' ter clean up ther galoot, let's do it, an' be done with it."

"Let's tie a rope ter his pig-tail an' drag him up ther gully with us," suggested one of the villains.

"That's right" said Jake. "As my horse is lame, I'll take his. Then we'll all be mounted putty well."

But Buck Davis held up his hand.

He was just enough interested in what he found to be the most curious Chinaman he ever met to want to let him go ahead and show the proposed trick.

"Let him go ahead," he said. "We don't want ter start till Young Wild West an' his gang gits putty nearly through ther gully, anyhow. It will be good ter kill ther time this way."

Hop smiled.

"You velly nicee Melican man," he observed. "Me likee you, so be."



"Is that ther trick yer was goin' ter do?"

"Me do plenty ticks, so be."

"An' yer kin tell fortunes, too?"

"Velly nicee."

"Go ahead an' tell mine, then."

"Allee light. You takee card froom um packee."

"Oh, what's ther use of foolin' with him, Buck?" spoke up Jake, in disgust. "He's only tryin' ter gain time, so he kin git a chance ter git away!"

"How's he goin' ter git away?" demanded the leader, partly. "Jest wait an' see what he does. I reckon he's somethin' more'n an ordinary heathen."

"Me allee samee velly muchee smartee Chinees," Hop hastened to assure them.

Buck now took a card from the pack in the Celestial's hands.

He looked at it and found it was the ace of spades. None of the men had dismounted, and neither had Hop.

Though he knew he was being watched closely, Hop slipped another card in the hip pocket of the leader.

He was so clever about it that no one observed it.

"Me know whatee card you takee," he said, looking at Buck and smiling.

"Do yer? Yer must have ther cards marked, then."

"No, me no markee cards. You takee um ace of spades."

"That's right. Here it is. Now, tell my fortune."

Hop took the card, studied it thoughtfully for a moment, and then said:

"You havee plenty money pletty soonee, allee samee velly muchee quickee; you gittee nice Melican gal, an' mally samee soonee; you livee velly long and havee bully old timee, so be."

"Well, that's a putty good fortune, I must say!" and Buck showed that he was really pleased.

Hop then tore the card into small pieces, taking care to drop one of them on the ground.

He pulled the big revolver he had from under his belt while the men looked at him in astonishment. He aimed the pieces into the muzzle of it.

"How everybody watchee," he said, raising the weapon so the muzzle pointed in the air.

"Don't let him shoot!" cried Jake, and he urged his horse over and caught Hop by the arm.

Just how it happened no one seemed to know, but the weapon went off with a report that was no louder than a pop-gun.

"Whatee matter?" queried Hop, making out he was alarmed. "You makee me shootee um card in um nicee Melican man's pockee, so be. Me wantee makee shootee in um air, so um pieces comee together and makee card allee light some more."

It took a couple of minutes for the villains to get quieted down, for when the pistol snapped they all thought that someone had been shot.

"That was your fault, Jake," said Buck. "Now, let ther heathen alone. I'm dealin' with him."

"You see me tear um ace of spades and puttee pieces in um pistol, so be?" asked Hop.

"Yes, we all seen yer do that."

"When me shootee um pieces allee samee comee together; um card allee samee no tore now. Me shootee in um pockee, 'cause um man makee go lat way."

"You shot the card in my pocket, eh? An' ther pieces have come together, have they? Well, I reckon I'll see about that."

Then he thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a card.

It was the ace of spades.

Buck was nothing if not superstitious, and when he saw the card his eyes fairly bulged.

"What do yer think of that, boys?" he said, with a gasp.

"He said he would show yer a trick, an' I reckon he's done it," said Hench, shrugging his shoulders.

"Lat allee samee velly nicee lillee tick," observed Hop. "Me velly muchee smartee Chinees!"

"Well, blamed if you ain't!" Buck exclaimed.

"You no killee poor Chinees."

"I reckon we won't exactly kill yer; not now, anyway. Boys, fetch him along with us."

"But I want that horse," spoke up Jake, making a move to dismount.

"Never mind that now; wait till we git through with this business. Come on! We've got ter rig a plan ter git hold of Young Wild West, an' this Chinees has got ter help it along. We'll use him fur what they call a decoy—see?"

"Me no wantee go," pleaded Hop.

"I know yer don't, but you've got ter, jest ther same. You jest done a mighty nice trick, an' I wouldn't part with yer now fur ther world. Come on! Keep him surrounded, boys, so he can't git a chance ter git away."

Off they rode, Jake bringing up the rear, not feeling pleased over the decision of the leader in regard to changing horses with the Chinaman.

They got into the gully, and up it where the turn was, and then they suddenly saw Young Wild West and his friends galloping toward them like the wind.

"Boys, I reckon we've got ter git out of this!" exclaimed the Cowboy Trailer. "They've doubled on us, I reckon."

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RANCHMAN CATCHES HIS MAN.

Young Wild West would have gone right on to the head of the gully if it had not occurred to him that perhaps the cattle thieves might be around somewhere and watching them.

When a little more than half-way through it he called a halt, and turning to Jim, said:

"I reckon you could climb that tree up there pretty handy, couldn't you, Jim?"

"Easy enough," was the reply, and Dart slipped from the saddle in a jiffy.

He knew what our hero wanted, and he began climbing the steep bank to get to the tree.

In a minute he was at the foot of the tree, which was



a tall pine, with ample limbs upon it to aid a person in ascending it.

"Just take a good look around when you get to the top, Jim," Wild said.

"All right," was the reply.

Jim went up with great agility.

As a tree-climber he could not be beaten, anyway.

He soon reached a fork near the top, and then he paused and looked around.

About the last direction he looked was the way they had come, and then it was that he gave a start of surprise.

He saw the gang of cattle thieves, or some other gang, near the mouth of the gully.

It was a good mile and a half to the spot, but the air was clear and the boy could see plainly.

He waited until he made out about how many of them there were, and then he came down the tree in a hurry.

"They must have got around us some way, Wild," he called out, as he dropped to the ground and started down the bank. "The whole gang of them is outside the gully, gathered in a group."

"Is that so?" our hero exclaimed. "Well, we had better get after them, then."

"Now for my revenge," said the ranchman, as he began coiling his lariat. "Remember! Jake Cotton is for me, boys!"

"Take it easy, Mr. Robinson," Wild suggested.

"Oh, I'm goin' ter take it easy," was the retort. "If I catch ther galoot with my rope I'm goin' ter drag him back to ther ranch."

They did not ride too fast, for they wanted to take the cattle thieves by surprise, if they could.

But when they neared the end of the gully, and suddenly saw them coming around a bend, Wild gave the word and they set out at a gallop.

It was just then that our hero noticed that Hop Wah was with the gang.

He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes.

But that did not stop him from going right ahead.

"Whoopce! Whoopce!" he shouted. "Boys, we've got to catch them! We will take them alive, if possible. Don't shoot, unless they do first."

In their haste in turning around to flee the villains quite forgot the Chinaman they had with them, and he rode right on to meet his friends.

Then the man known as Hench, who had a rifle, raised it to shoot the fleeing Chinaman.

But Cherenne Charlie was too quick for him.

He had put his rifle to his shoulder the moment he saw Hop break away from the gang.

Crack!

The sharp report rang out, and Hench went down.

"That's one of 'em!" exclaimed the scout. "I reckon that heathen is worth a dozen sich galoots as he was."

Hard pressed, and seeing one of their companions fall, made the cattle thieves desperate.

The man who had the one remaining rifle turned to try and pick off Young Wild West.

Crack!

It was the scout's rifle that spoke again, and the villain fell.

That was enough!

They did not fire any more shots just then, and when they rode out of the gully some went one way and some another.

Wild had his eyes on the Cowboy Trailer.

He turned to the left and galloped for the woods, five of his men starting after him.

The others, with Jake in the lead on his lame horse, turned to the right.

Wild and the cowboys went after the biggest bunch, while his partners and the ranchman turned for the others.

Jake must have got frightened, and did not know just what way he was going, for he turned and headed for the timber that lay between them and the ranch.

Hop came along after them, satisfied with what he had done.

"That lame cayuse kin git over the graas putty fast, too," remarked the scout.

"Yes, but he won't hold it long," answered Robinson, his eyes blazing in his eagerness to get the man who had killed his horse for spite. "I'll have him putty soon."

"An' we'll have ther others, too," answered the scout. "I hope Wild gits ther leader of ther gang."

"He'll get him," Jim answered.

The two had come with the ranchman because they knew it was Wild's wish that he did nothing cruel to the villain, if he caught him.

He had threatened to drag him a mile behind a horse, and unless it was very soft ground he went over, that would be murder by inches.

Both Charlie and Jim were confident of overhauling the four men.

They kept right on, gaining gradually.

But half way to the timber the lame horse gave out.

His friends came to a halt in an effort to save him, and then the pursuers were close enough to use their revolvers.

"Stop right where yer are, you measly coyotes!" called out the scout.

Crack!

Jake fired a shot with his revolver and the bullet whistled over Charlie's head.

"Don't hit him!" cried Robinson, as he saw Charlie put his rifle to his shoulder.

Crang!

The report of the weapon rang out and the revolver was seen to fly from Jake's hand.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the ranchman. "Yer hit his shooter, didn't yer?"

"That's what I shot at," was the reply. "I ain't goin' ter stop your part in ther game. Now, go ahead an' git ther galoot!"

Jake started to run across the prairie, as though he had a chance to escape that way.

The ranchman swooped toward him, swinging his rope.

The other three villains gave in, and, holding up their hands, they waited for Charlie and Jim to ride up.

Whizz!

Robinson let his lariat go and looped it over the head of the man who had stolen his horse, and then shot the animal.



It caught him about the arms, and then he was fast. "I've got yer, you hound!" cried the ranchman, as he dismounted and ran up to his victim. "Your doom is sealed! You killed ther best horse that ever lived, jest fur nothin', and now you're goin' ter git your medicine!"

"Not yet!" answered the villain, as he cleared himself from the lariat. "If yer mean ter kill me it's my business ter kill you first! Take that!"

He drew a knife from his belt and rushed at him savagely.

But Robinson was not to be foiled now.

He dodged the blow and kicked the villain full in the stomach.

The scoundrel went down, gasping for breath.

Then the ranchman pounced upon him and quickly made the rope fast about his body, pinning his arms above the elbows.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "You've got ter suffer, Jake Cotton. There ain't no help fur it. I swore I would have revenge, an' I'm goin' ter have it!"

He pulled him along after him, and when he mounted his horse, and was about to gallop off, Jim Dart called out:

"Hold on, Mr. Robinson! Where are you going with him?"

"I'm goin' ter drag him from here to ther ranch," was the reply; "right through ther woods an' all!"

"No, you are not!"

"What's that?" and the vengeful man's eyes kindled.

"Maybe he's deservin' of it, but yer can't do that, boss," spoke up the scout. "Young Wild West wouldn't allow it, if he was here, an' we're actin' fur him. Yer kin trot your horse, an' make him run along, if yer like, but no draggin', not where ther ground is rough."

"Who's doin' this here thing?" demanded the ranchman.

"Well, you're trying to do it; but you won't, unless you do it the way we want you to," said Jim Dart, decisively.

"Didn't he kill my horse, an' didn't he set my barn on fire?"

"That's all right. No one would have said a word if you had shot him dead when he turned on you with his knife. But you've got him a prisoner now, and you can't murder him by inches. Maybe a little dragging will do him good when you get close to the ranch house, where the ground is soft; but not here."

Robinson looked around appealingly. But there was no one in sight but Hop, and he knew he could expect nothing from him, so he gave in.

Charlie and Jim decided to go with him to the house, trusting to Wild and the cowboys to run down the rest of the gang.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CONCLUSION.

Wild was bent on capturing the man who had threatened to trail him down and kill him.

He had heard that Buck Davis was wanted by the Sheriff, and he meant to get him and see that he was delivered to him, if any way possible.

"Come on, boys!" he cried, as the villains turned into

the woods. "Keep after them hot. Don't shoot until they begin it."

As they rode up to the edge of the woods the villains were about a hundred yards away from them.

Buck was making for the trail they had come over when they left their camp that morning.

Until he reached it he could make but slow progress through the thicket.

Young Wild West noticed the direction they were heading for, and he quickly turned that way.

It was a very good move, for the cattle thieves came out upon the trail but a hundred feet ahead of them.

"Halt!" commanded our hero, in a ringing voice.

"Never!" came the defiant reply.

Crack!

One of the villains fired and a cowboy had his arm grazed by the bullet.

Crack!

Another shot was fired, and then the cowboys let go a volley.

Two men went down and a horse staggered and threw its rider.

Then there was a rapid exchange of shots, but there were so many trees intervening that the bullets nearly all failed to reach the mark.

Wild had not fired yet.

He was keeping an eye on the leader.

Buck was lying close to the neck of his horse, no doubt expecting every minute to be hit.

But he kept firing as he rode.

Wild hated to do it, but he saw that the only way to get the man in a hurry was to shoot his horse from under him.

He could not use his lariat, and if the villain reached a part of the woods where he might find a hiding place, owing to his knowledge of the vicinity, the chase would be for naught.

The broncho was old and bony, anyhow, and it would be no sin to put it out of its misery.

But just as our hero was going to shoot the horse the animal stumbled and fell, breaking a leg and throwing the rider headlong against a tree.

Crack! Crack!

The cowboys got a good chance and the last of the gang were brought down.

The dashing young deadshot rode up and found the Cowboy Trailer lying in a dazed condition.

The cowboys were yelling with delight now, for only one of them had been hit in the running fight, and that was such a slight wound that it was of no consequence.

Wild pointed to the horse, which was trying to get up with a broken foreleg, and one of the men quickly shot it and ended the suffering.

"Now, boys, just tie this fellow up, will you?" our hero said. "Then look around and see if the rest of the villains are all dead. I reckon there won't be any more cattle stole around here for a while."

Buck Davis was disarmed and bound without hardly knowing it.

A horse was caught and he was tied upon it.

Then Wild left the cowboys to attend to the dead cattle thieves and set out for the ranch with his prisoner.



Wild got over the ground quite rapidly, for the horse the captive was tied to proved to be willing to travel.

He took a short cut for the ranch and made through the timber about two miles above the cattle trail.

By doing this he reached the house in advance of his partners and the ranchman.

Buck Davis had come to his full senses before this, but he had not opened his mouth, either to plead or to rail at his captor.

But when he was landed at the house, and Fred Martin and the girls came out, he put on an air of defiance and exclaimed:

"Well, what do yer think of me? I'm the Cowboy Trailer, an' I ain't dead yet!"

"I shouldn't want to be as near to it as you are," Arietta retorted. "I've seen lots of your kind in the same fix that you are in, and I rather think they all wore rope neckties a little later on. You are the Cowboy Trailer who failed to trail."

"Here comes uncle!" cried Maggie Neal, just then. "Oh! Look!"

Sure enough, the ranchman was coming.

He was less than half a mile away, and his horse was on a gentle trot.

A man was running along behind him, and it was easy for them all to guess who it was.

Behind them, a short distance, came Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, with Hop Wahi and three prisoners.

Wild started on foot to meet the ranchman, and when they saw him Charlie and Jim came galloping up, leaving Hop in charge of the prisoners.

As they met Wild and dismounted the ranchman started his horse at a swift gallop.

Jake was jerked from off his feet and then he was dragged along over the soft ground.

"Wild, just see if it is the right man when he comes up," said Jim. "I thought, by the way one of the prisoners spoke, that he might not be."

"I'll soon tell you," was the reply.

It was rough treatment that the villain was getting now, and he was yelling at the top of his voice.

But Robinson soon reached our friends and brought his horse to a halt.

Fred Martin came running from the house now.

But the girls went inside.

They did not care to look at that sort of a thing.

"Mercy!" cried the wretch, who was a pitiful sight, indeed.

"Let up on him, uncle!" called out the young man from the East.

But it was not necessary, for that part of the work had been finished.

"There he is!" exclaimed the ranchman, pointing to the wretch he had dragged over the prairie until his clothing was literally in rags. "I swore I'd get him, an' I did."

Young Wild West saw that he had caught the right man.

"That's the galoot who shot the horse, just for spite, Jim," he said.

"Well, we must see to it that he doesn't give him any more of that kind of medicine, Wild."

"That's right. I wonder how far they will have to go to get the Sheriff or some of his men?"

"Shin Hollow is only twenty miles to the south of the ranch," spoke up Fred Martin.

"Can you ride?" Wild asked.

"Oh, yes," was the reply.

"Get a horse and go over, then. Fetch some one to take charge of these prisoners."

The young man was only too glad of the opportunity.

In a few minutes he had given his sweetheart a parting kiss and was off.

Wild now took charge of Jake, in spite of the protests of the ranchman, who wanted to hang him to the nearest tree.

But his wife and the girls soon made him see the folly of this, and he gave in.

A couple of hours later the cowboys came in, bringing three more prisoners.

Two of them had not been hit at all, but had dropped from their horses to save themselves from being shot, and had played possum until they were discovered by the cowboys.

The third was wounded in the thigh, but not dangerously.

That made seven survivors of the gang of twelve cattle thieves.

Early in the afternoon Fred Martin came back with a dozen men, who had been sworn in as deputies by the Sheriff, who was leading them.

He happened to be in Shin Hollow when the young man got there, and hearing that the notorious Cowboy Trailer had been caught, he made haste to get over to Parrot Ranch.

There is not much more to be told.

It is not necessary to go into details as to what happened to the cattle thieves.

At the time of which we write a horse or cattle thief stood little show in Northwestern Texas when caught.

That is enough to say about them.

Young Wild West and his friends remained at the ranch a couple of days, and when they took their departure, on their way to their own ranch on the Rio Grande, Robinson shook hands with them and declared that he had had his revenge, and that he was satisfied.

"Kit was a fine horse," he said, with tears in his eyes, "but the killin' of Jake Cotton couldn't bring him back to life."

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE MISSING SCOUT; or, ARIETTA AND THE MADMAN," which will be the next number (272) of "Wild West Weekly."

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## SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

While looking for stray cattle down in the Brown's Hole country, near Sunset Creek, Colo., a few days ago, E. E. Clark of Toponas and a companion ran upon a three-year-old black bear in an open place of ground and roped it, but the animal wouldn't stay roped. Several times it freed itself with its claws and each time charged upon the men, who were forced to put spurs to their horses in order to escape. The last time the bear got the rope free from its neck it made for the timber after giving a short chase of its would-be captors, and the time they had again prepared their lariats he was up a tree, in which it was kept until Clark could ride to a ranch house four miles distant to obtain a rifle and kill it.

Ethel Johnson, a child heroine of the Columbia disaster, has received a magnificent butterfly of gold and diamonds from an unknown admirer. It was taken to the home of R. R. Dingle, where the little girl is stopping, by a jewelry store employee. There was no note of explanation, no signature, telling who was the sender of so magnificent a gift, merely the words, "From a Portland admirer." Little Ethel Johnson saved two lives in the Columbia disaster. She rescued her child companion, Effie Gordon, and held her above water until taken aboard a lifeboat. While struggling with her companion a man who could scarcely swim was also saved by her. He seized hold upon her and was also held above the water by her childish efforts. Perhaps this man sent the present.

Miss Stella Alexander, deaconess of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Walla Walla, Wash., has been appointed to the pastorate of the Methodist Church in Cottonwood, Idaho, until the annual conference, which takes place in September. As women are not eligible for ordination in the Methodist Church it is expected that a man will be appointed to succeed Miss Alexander by the conference. The presiding elder gave her temporary charge of the church in Cottonwood because she proved herself an excellent church worker while in Walla Walla. She not only built up the Sunday-school, of which she had full charge, but was the direct means of adding many new members to the church itself. Even during her short pastorate in Cottonwood he expects her to accomplish much in building up the congregation and getting things ready for her successor.

The history of the grape is almost as old as that of man. Growing in its highest perfection in Syria and Persia, its luscious fruit recommended it to the especial care of the patriarchal tillers of the soil, and vineyards were extensively planted long before orchards or collections of other fruit trees were at all common. The grapes came originally from Persia,

From the latter country as civilization advanced westward, this fruit accompanied it—first to Egypt, then to Greece, Sicily, Italy, Spain, France and then to Great Britain, to which latter country the Romans carried it 200 years after Christ. To America the seeds and plants of the European varieties were brought by emigrants and colonists the first fifty years after its settlement. There are a vast number of varieties of grapes, but there are really only about a dozen varieties good for the table. California produces the Tokay, Muscat, Black Prince, Malaga, etc., while the Eastern States produce such varieties as the Concord, Catawba, Niagara, Delaware, Black Hamburg and Isabella.

In the northeastern corner of France, in the Pas-de-Calais Department, there is a stretch of country which possesses practically no roads. This region, lying between St. Omer and the Belgian frontier, is traversed in every direction by canals, which serve as a means of communication between the different centers of population. The people use skiffs, not unlike Venetian gondolas, and in these they glide silently to field and market. The village cure makes his rounds of visits by water, the very horses have to be taken by boat to and from the fields in which they work, and it is no uncommon occurrence for a frisky animal to kick out, over-balance the frail craft, and precipitate its occupants into the water. It is a region of perpetual peace, a country of eternal calm, where the noise of wheeled traffic is unknown, where the motor horn is never heard, says the London Graphic. A frequent sight in these narrow waterways is a funeral procession. The coffin is placed on a couple of chairs and is covered with a cloth. The nearest relatives of the deceased sit behind the coffin, friends follow in other boats, and the priest recites his prayers while the little cortege makes its way slowly to the burial place.

## GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

She had become engaged for the first time, and love's young dream had wrapped itself around her soul with the thickness of an elderdown quilt. But she was bashful, and blushed and started like the trembling fawn whenever the name of her lover was mentioned. At last her little brother spoke: "I wanted so much to peep through the keyhole last night while you were in the parlor with Mr. Hangan." "But, like a good little boy, you didn't, did you?" "No, the servant got there first."

The Rev. Anna Shaw, President of the American Woman's Suffrage Association, said in an address in Chicago: "An excellent cure for false pride is a little College Settlement work. By false pride I mean the belief that the poor regard one as noble and fine because one happens to be rich. Servants and dependents have to encourage this false pride in us, but a little Settlement work soon undoes the mischief. I know a Philadelphia woman. She is proud because her great-grandfather, a carpenter, happened to own land that is now worth millions. In her haughty way she did some Settlement work during Lent. There was an old woman whom she visited every few days. She carried the old woman jellies, tea, olives and suchlike luxuries. And she was secretly pleased with the attention she attracted as she passed up and down the narrow, squalid street. 'Your neighbors stare at me a good deal,' she said complacently one morning. 'I'll be bound for that,' said the old woman. 'I suppose they are very inquisitive, eh?' 'They certainly are, the busybodies,' the old woman grumbled. 'No doubt they question you about me a good deal?' 'Indeed they do, mum.' The visitor smiled again. 'And what do you tell them?' she asked sweetly. 'Oh,' said the old woman, 'I just say yer me dressmaker, and let it go at that.'"



## THE MEXICAN'S GOLD.

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG.

The day was merging into twilight as James Benton was riding homeward from the cattle range, and the soft haze peculiar to a summer evening on the tablelands of New Mexico hung like a mystic canopy over all the land, while yonder, in the bottom meadows along the stream in which the herds of old Abner Holdsworth, the ranchman of the valley, quenched their thirst, the smoky mist deepened into fog.

James Benton's thoughts were in accord with the darkening and uncertain scene of which he formed the central figure. He was in doubt and trouble, for the honest, true-hearted young herdsman saw the dark mist of a bitter disappointment descending over all his dearest hopes. Ever since he had come into the service of Abner Holdsworth as the head herdsman of the great cattle range James had worshiped at the shrine of beauty, and ere long, though thus far he had been a silent devotee, not venturing to breathe the secret of his love for pretty Clair, the old ranchman's daughter, the young man felt that the love she had awakened was to make or mar his future.

And he had been hopeful. True he was only a poor man occupying a situation of service, but he felt there was a dignity in honest labor faithfully performed that should not demean him in the eyes of sweet Clair, the little queen of the cattle range.

James had drawn encouragement from the demeanor of the lady of the ranch. Despite the disparity or inequality of their stations, viewed in a worldly light, it had seemed to him that Clair was not indifferent to his devotion, expressed in a thousand ways without the intervention of words.

The maiden was learning to love the young herdsman, but she was young. The world was new to her and the horizon which closed in the area of her vision limited her knowledge of it all. And she had dreams of social triumphs—of the enjoyment of wealth in the enchanted East, to which her father promised one day to return with her.

And so, when Gomez Santiago, the dashing young Mexican ranchero, purchased "the southern range," adjoining the confines of her father's ranch and came to pay his respects in a neighborly way, Clair was quite fascinated by his brilliant social acquirements.

The Mexican was darkly handsome—indeed his was the romantic type of swarthy beauty, such as school girls are apt to fancy. But withal Gomez Santiago's appearance was rather too dashing and brigandish.

So hard-headed old Abner, the maiden's father, was inclined to think.

But he was a worldly man, and Gomez Santiago was rich. Of the young Mexican's wealth there was no question; for had he not stocked the great Southern range with thousands of the finest cattle and sheep in all the grazing country of New Mexico? and had he not built a dwelling that was the wonder of that entire section?

And besides all that, the Mexican was served by a hundred peons and cowboys.

So when old Abner saw that Gomez looked with favor upon his daughter, and that he came more frequently to the Holdsworth ranch than the requirements of ordinary neighborly friendship would have dictated, he smiled approval.

The old cattle-man thought what a grand thing it would be to unite the great Southern cattle range with his own wide domain, and his ambition for his daughter was awakened.

"Ah," said the old ranchman, reflectively, to himself, "poor Edwin, my only son, will never return. I have abandoned all hope of that, and I shall give the range to Clair when I am done with it. Then, if she becomes Santiago's wife, she will be the richest woman in all New Mexico."

And James Benton overheard this remark which the old cattleman made, intending not that any one should hear.

One day as James was out on the range he went as far as a stream of water which flowed through the range. While he was resting on his horse amid a group of trees, who should

come down to the river's edge but Gomez. He seemed somewhat excited. Suddenly he raised himself in his saddle and flung a glittering object into the water.

"Diablo! I am well rid of it. The occurrence at the old herdsman's house was a fatality."

Thus speaking and without having discovered James Benton, the Mexican touched his steed with the spurs and galloped away toward his home.

The mist swallowed up horse and rider in a moment and James was alone. But he did not ride on at once.

He had heard every word said by Gomez. That the object the Mexican had cast into the stream was something which would prove Gomez's real character he could not doubt. But it was impossible to recover it.

"I'll watch him closer now. I'll seek always to surprise his secret. Ah, something occurred at my employer's house to-day that alarmed the fellow. I might acquaint myself with that."

With this resolve formed in his mind James again rode forward.

Less than a mile further on, where the stream became wide and shallow, was the ford, and James was just riding into it when from out the now dark shadows of a coppice at the brink of the stream Clair rode into view mounted upon her beautiful snow-white pony.

It seemed she had recently crossed the ford, for the delicate limbs of the pony were dripping and the water could only have come from the stream.

"Oh, James, Mr. Benton!" cried Clair, in excited tones, as she saw the herdsman. "I have made a discovery that fills me with mingled hope and dread. See here, among the rubbish which has collected between the stepping stones at the ford I picked up this."

The young girl held up a glittering object as she spoke.

James Benton uttered an exclamation, for he could have sworn that the object now in Clair's hand was the very same that he had seen Gomez cast into the swift current up stream.

The young man now saw that the mysterious object was really a knitted-purse made of gold-thread.

"A pretty purse, Miss Clair. But whyfore has the finding of it occasioned you emotion such as you speak of?" said James.

"Oh, you do not know. I made that purse and gave it to my brother Edwin for a birthday gift before he went to hunt gold in the unknown depths of the Sierra Madre."

All at once a strange and terrible thought entered James Benton's mind.

He knew that Gomez Santiago had come to the neighborhood since the departure of Edwin Clair's brother.

The story of Edwin's going in search of gold, which he had previously heard from Clair, recurred to the young man's mind now.

He recollected that, inspired by the legends of vast treasures hidden in the mysterious caves of "the ancient cliff-dwellers" of New Mexico, Clair's only brother had, two years previously, set out in company with several adventurous comrades who also hoped to acquire sudden wealth, with the avowed purpose in mind of penetrating and exploring the caverns of a forgotten race.

The gold-seekers had departed full of hope and ardent dreams of Aladdin-like treasures to be found where they had lain concealed beyond the memory of man, like the cemented deposits of corn discovered by archaeologists in Arizona, among the caverns of the same race.

The explorers were led by an Indian guide, an Apache, whose perfect confidence had been won by Edwin Holdsworth. The Indian was regarded as trustworthy, and he was one of the oldest of his tribe. He avowed his knowledge of many excavations made by the extinct race of cave-dwellers, which had not as yet been explored by white men.

But now two years had elapsed, and no report had been received from Edwin and his party, and their friends were compelled to think that they had perished.

As James thought over all this, Clair broke in upon his mental retrospect, saying:

"And my dear lost brother took this knitted purse with him



when he set out upon the ill-fated gold quest whence he has never returned.

She paused and added:

"And, now that I have found the keepsake poor Edwin carried with him here, what am I to think? Certainly I must infer that he is near—that he is coming back to us, and that he lost this purse, or—oh, I cannot consider such a possibility calmly—that he has been slain and robbed!"

"And," added James, "if that be so, the robber and assassin must have been near here."

"Yes, yes. Oh, James—Mr. Benton—would that I could know the truth!"

"I will help you to discover it; but first answer me this: Was Gomez Santiago at your house to-day?"

Clair suddenly blushed.

"Why—why do you ask that? It seems to me the question is out of place; but I will answer it. Yes, Mr. Santiago was at our house this evening. He rode away but a short time ago."

"I thought so," said James, and there was an intonation of hidden meaning in his words that caused her to glance into his face searchingly, as she said:

"What do you mean by that, James Benton?"

In his heart the conviction was now fixed that Gomez Santiago was an assassin, and he cried, mentally:

"Monster! He would wed the sister of his victim!"

But aloud he replied:

"I think some incident transpired at your house to-day during the Mexican's presence, which may have seemed to you somewhat out of the common. Tell me, is it not so?"

Clair paled a little and started in her saddle.

"Yes—now I think of it, something did occur. For the first time since we have known him, Mr. Santiago, while at our house to-day, saw the picture of my brother Edwin, and I noticed in surprise that he evinced strange excitement when he saw the pictured face. But he said it was my brother's startling likeness to a dear dead relative of his that shocked him."

"No!" exclaimed James Benton, unable longer to conceal his suspicions. "The Mexican beheld the pictured face of his victim when he looked upon your brother's portrait."

"Sir! James Benton, you forget yourself. Mr. Santiago is a gentleman and above suspicion. Ah, I thought better of you than this. Would you poison my mind against the absent because you dislike him? Your conduct is cowardly, sir!"

James Benton's face turned as pale as death, but he only said:

"Miss Clair, some day you will recall those cruel words. Good-evening."

He turned aside and rode away. Never once did he look back, and, with a wildly beating heart in which, despite her determination to the contrary, a dreadful doubt of the Mexican was now awakened Clair watched him.

The impulse to call him back became irresistible.

"Mr. Benton! Mr. Benton!" called Clair.

But he heard her not, or hearing heeded not, and his noble steed carried him on and on at a swift gallop until he was lost to the sight of the girl who had broken his faithful heart.

The next day he resigned his situation as head herdsman, and went away without seeing Clair.

When her father told her of his going, Clair was miserable. She shed a few tears, and told herself that he was unworthy of a regret, because he had traduced his rival in a cowardly way. But some way she felt his absence, and when Gomez came again, he detected a certain coldness in her manner toward him which he did not understand.

When James left the range, he went to find out the truth about Edwin. The brother of the Apache Indian who had gone as a guide with the gold-hunters was anxious to go with James, and he knew the Sierra country well. So James disguised himself as an Indian, and in company with the Apache, set out upon his quest.

Four months subsequently the Mexican's marriage to Clair was announced to take place in ten days. In a measure, this strange man had again fascinated Clair, and truth to say, in

her secret heart she was piqued to think that James had never returned. But the young girl did not really love Gomez. It was a case of serpent and dove. He exerted a strange power over her.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was the night before the day set for the wedding of Gomez and Clair, and Abner Holdsworth was alone in his favorite room. Suddenly there came a knock at the door, and upon opening it the old herdsman was confronted by a man whom he did not know at the first glance, nor, indeed, until his guest revealed the fact that he was James Benton, his former head herdsman, and that he had returned in disguise for a purpose.

James' face was stained, and skillful lining had changed its look, then, too, hardship had made his face thin and somewhat haggard. He had no fear that any one would recognize him.

James told Abner Holdsworth a strange story.

He said that he had gone away to seek for Edwin, and that he had found the remains of the unfortunate young man and his comrades in a cave far away in the heart of the mountains. That there was every evidence to indicate that the entire party had been massacred. But Edwin had survived his death wound long enough to write the name of his slayer.

Then James placed in Abner Holdsworth's hand a scrap of paper, which he had found in the cave of death, on which were written these words:

"I have received a fatal wound at the hands of one Gomez Santiago, a Mexican desperado, and his band of robbers have slain all my comrades. We had just discovered a vast quantity of hidden gold. This the Mexicans have carried away with them. I can write no more. Edwin Holdsworth."

"Oh, God, my poor boy!" cried the bereaved old father.

Then he exclaimed fiercely:

"Now I understand why the Mexican was so frightened when he saw my son's portrait here. Oh, to think that I consented that he should wed Clair. But he shall pay the penalty of crime. I'll have my revenge!"

"You shall. Hark! that is Gomez's voice. He is about to enter this room. Tell him the story I have told you, and then—"

James was interrupted by the entrance of Gomez.

Gomez greeted Abner and bowed to the supposed stranger. Then the swarthy villain lighted a cigarette, and seating himself on a barrel head, for the room was rudely furnished, he looked the personification of careless ease.

Abner Holdsworth arose, and standing between James and the Mexican with a strange calmness, while he extended his right hand and pointed at Gomez, began to tell the story of his murdered son.

Meanwhile, behind Mr. Holdsworth, James drew a revolver, cocked it covertly, and as Mr. Holdsworth's left hand hung carelessly behind him, James pressed the weapon into it. The old man clutched the pistol.

As the story progressed Gomez turned pale as death, and when finally the climax was reached, Abner Holdsworth thundered:

"And you, Gomez Santiago, are my son's murderer!"

Then the villain knew all was discovered.

He leaped from his seat and snatched a revolver from his belt. The assassin was mad with disappointment. He thought his accuser was unarmed, and he meant to kill him. But quick as a flash Abner Holdsworth presented the pistol James had given him, and fired just in time to save himself. The Mexican fell never to rise.

"My work is done. I have saved Clair, and now I will go away again," said James, sadly.

"No, no, James, you must not go away again! Oh, forgive me—forgive me!" cried Clair, bursting into the room.

She had overheard all from the adjoining apartment.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I think I loved you all the time, dear James," said Clair, as the young ranchman, instead of Gomez, the Mexican, led the beautiful girl to the altar next day.



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