

Reed Anthony, Cowman

by

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I. In Retrospect

I can truthfully say that my entire life has been spent with cattle. Even during my four years' service in the Confederate army, the greater portion was spent with the commissary department, in charge of its beef supplies. I was wounded early in the second year of the war and disabled as a soldier, but rather than remain at home I accepted a menial position under a quartermaster. Those were strenuous times. During Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania we followed in the wake of the army with over a thousand cattle, and after Gettysburg we led the retreat with double that number. Near the close of the war we frequently had no cattle to hold, and I became little more than a camp-follower.

I was born in the Shenandoah Valley, northern Virginia, May 3, 1840. My father was a thrifty planter and stockman, owned a few slaves, and as early as I can remember fed cattle every winter for the eastern markets. Grandfather Anthony, who died before I was born, was a Scotchman who had emigrated to the Old Dominion at an early day, and acquired several large tracts of land on an affluent of the Shenandoah. On my paternal side I never knew any of my ancestors, but have good cause to believe they were adventurers. My mother's maiden name was Reed; she was of a gentle family, who were able to trace their forbears beyond the colonial days, even to the gentry of England. Generations of good birth were reflected in my mother; and across a rough and eventful life I can distinctly remember the refinement of her manners, her courtesy to guests, her kindness to child and slave.

My boyhood days were happy ones. I attended a subscription school several miles from home, riding back and forth on a pony. The studies were elementary, and though I never distinguished myself in my classes, I was always ready to race my pony, and never refused to play truant when the swimming was good. Evidently my father never intended any of his boys for a professional career, though it was an earnest hope of my mother that all of us should receive a college education. My elder brother and I early developed business instincts, buying calves and accompanying our father on his trading expeditions. Once during a vacation, when we were about twelve and ten years old, both of us crossed the mountains with him into what is now West Virginia, where he bought about two hundred young steers and drove them back to our home in the valley. I must have been blessed with an unflinching memory; over fifty years have passed since that, my first trip from home, yet I remember it vividly--can recall conversations between my father and the sellers as they haggled over the cattle. I remember the money, gold and silver, with which to pay for the steers, was carried by my father in ordinary saddle-bags thrown across his saddle. As occasion demanded, frequently the funds were carried by a negro man of ours, and at night, when among acquaintances, the heavy saddle-bags were thrown into a corner, every one aware of their contents.

But the great event of my boyhood was a trip to Baltimore. There was no railroad at the time, and as that was our market for fat cattle, it was necessary to drive the entire way. My father had made the trip yearly since I could remember, the distance being nearly two hundred miles, and generally carrying as many as one hundred and fifty big beeves. They traveled slowly, pasturing or feeding grain on the way, in order that the cattle should arrive at the market in salable condition. One horse was allowed with the herd, and on another my father rode, far in advance, to engage pasture or feed and shelter for his men. When on the road a boy always led a gentle ox in the lead of the beeves; negro men walked on either flank, and the horseman brought up the rear. I used to envy the boy leading the ox, even though he was a darky. The negro boys on our plantation always pleaded with "Mars" John, my father, for the privilege; and when one of them had made the trip to Baltimore as a toll boy he easily outranked us younger whites. I must have made application for the position when I was about seven years old, for it seemed an age before my request was granted. My brother, only two years older than I, had made the trip twice, and when I was twelve the great opportunity came. My father had nearly two hundred cattle to go to market that year, and the start was made one morning early in June. I can distinctly see my mother standing on the veranda of our home as I led the herd by with a big red ox, trembling with fear that at the final moment her permission might be withdrawn and that I should have to remain behind. But she never interfered with my father, who took great pains to teach his boys everything practical in the cattle business.

It took us twenty days to reach Baltimore. We always started early in the morning, allowing the beeves to graze and rest along the road, and securing good pastures for them at night. Several times it rained, making the road soft, but I stripped off my shoes and took it barefooted through the mud. The lead ox was a fine, big fellow, each horn tipped with a brass knob, and he and I set the pace, which was scarcely that of a snail. The days were long, I grew desperately hungry between meals, and the novelty of leading that ox soon lost its romance. But I was determined not to show that I was tired or hungry, and frequently, when my father was with us and offered to take me up behind him on his horse, I spurned his offer and trudged on till the end of the day. The mere driving of the beeves would have been monotonous, but the constant change of scene kept us in good spirits, and our darkies always crooned old songs when the road passed through woodlands. After the beeves were marketed we spent a day in the city, and my father took my brother and me to the theatre. Although the world was unfolding rather rapidly for a country boy of twelve, it was with difficulty that I was made to understand that what we had witnessed on the stage was but mimicry.

The third day after reaching the city we started on our return. The proceeds from the sale of the cattle were sent home by boat. With only two horses, each of which carried double, and walking turn about, we reached home in seven days, settling all bills on the way. That year was a type of others until I was eighteen, at which age I could guess within twenty pounds of the weight of any beef on foot, and when I bought calves and yearling steers I knew just what kind of cattle they

would make at maturity. In the mean time, one summer my father had gone west as far as the State of Missouri, traveling by boat to Jefferson City, and thence inland on horseback. Several of our neighbors had accompanied him, all of them buying land, my father securing four sections. I had younger brothers growing up, and the year my oldest brother attained his majority my father outfitted him with teams, wagons, and two trusty negro men, and we started for the nearest point on the Ohio River, our destination being the new lands in the West. We embarked on the first boat, drifting down the Ohio, and up the other rivers, reaching the Ultima Thule of our hopes within a month. The land was new; I liked it; we lived on venison and wild turkeys, and when once we had built a log house and opened a few fields, we were at peace with the earth.

But this happy existence was of short duration. Rumors of war reached us in our western elysium, and I turned my face homeward, as did many another son of Virginia. My brother was sensible enough to remain behind on the new farm; but with nothing to restrain me I soon found myself in St. Louis. There I met kindred spirits, eager for the coming fray, and before attaining my majority I was bearing arms and wearing the gray of the Confederacy. My regiment saw very little service during the first year of the war, as it was stationed in the western division, but early in 1862 it was engaged in numerous actions.

I shall never forget my first glimpse of the Texas cavalry. We had moved out from Corinth, under cover of darkness, to attack Grant at Pittsburg Landing. When day broke, orders were given to open out and allow the cavalry to pass ahead and reconnoitre our front. I had always felt proud of Virginian horsemanship, but those Texans were in a class by themselves. Centaur-like they sat their horses, and for our amusement, while passing at full gallop, swung from their saddles and picked up hats and handkerchiefs. There was something about the Texans that fascinated me, and that Sunday morning I resolved, if spared, to make Texas my future home. I have good cause to remember the battle of Shiloh, for during the second day I was twice wounded, yet saved from falling into the enemy's hands.

My recovery was due to youth and a splendid constitution. Within six weeks I was invalided home, and inside a few months I was assigned to the commissary department with the army in Virginia. It was while in the latter service that I made the acquaintance of many Texans, from whom I learned a great deal about the resources of their State,—its immense herds of cattle, the cheapness of its lands, and its perpetual summer. During the last year of the war, on account of their ability to handle cattle, a number of Texans were detailed to care for the army's beef supply. From these men I received much information and a pressing invitation to accompany them home, and after the parole at Appomattox I took their address, promising to join them in the near future. On my return to the old homestead I found the place desolate, with burnt barns and fields laid waste. The Shenandoah Valley had experienced war in its dread reality, for on every hand were the charred remains of once splendid homes. I had little hope that the

country would ever recover, but my father, stout-hearted as ever, had already begun anew, and after helping him that summer and fall I again drifted west to my brother's farm.

The war had developed a restless, vagabond spirit in me. I had little heart to work, was unsettled as to my future, and, to add to my other troubles, after reaching Missouri one of my wounds reopened. In the mean time my brother had married, and had a fine farm opened up. He offered me every encouragement and assistance to settle down to the life of a farmer; but I was impatient, worthless, undergoing a formative period of early manhood, even spurning the advice of father, mother, and dearest friends. If to-day, across the lapse of years, the question were asked what led me from the bondage of my discontent, it would remain unanswered. Possibly it was the advantage of good birth; surely the prayers of a mother had always followed me, and my feet were finally led into the paths of industry. Since that day of uncertainty, grandsons have sat upon my knee, clamoring for a story about Indians, the war, or cattle trails. If I were to assign a motive for thus leaving a tangible record of my life, it would be that my posterity--not the present generation, absorbed in its greed of gain, but a more distant and a saner one--should be enabled to glean a faint idea of one of their forbears. A worthy and secondary motive is to give an idea of the old West and to preserve from oblivion a rapidly vanishing type of pioneers.

My personal appearance can be of little interest to coming generations, but rather what I felt, saw, and accomplished. It was always a matter of regret to me that I was such a poor shot with a pistol. The only two exceptions worthy of mention were mere accidents. In my boyhood's home, in Virginia, my father killed yearly a large number of hogs for the household needs as well as for supplying our slave families with bacon. The hogs usually ran in the woods, feeding and thriving on the mast, but before killing time we always baited them into the fields and finished their fattening with peas and corn. It was customary to wait until the beginning of winter, or about the second cold spell, to butcher, and at the time in question there were about fifty large hogs to kill. It was a gala event with us boys, the oldest of whom were allowed to shoot one or more with a rifle. The hogs had been tolled into a small field for the killing, and towards the close of the day a number of them, having been wounded and requiring a second or third shot, became cross. These subsequent shots were usually delivered from a six-shooter, and in order to have it at hand in case of a miss I was intrusted with carrying the pistol. There was one heavy-tusked five-year-old stag among the hogs that year who refused to present his head for a target, and took refuge in a brier thicket. He was left until the last, when we all sallied out to make the final kill. There were two rifles, and had the chance come to my father, I think he would have killed him easily; but the opportunity came to a neighbor, who overshot, merely causing a slight wound. The next instant the stag charged at me from the cover of the thickety fence corner. Not having sense enough to take to the nearest protection, I turned and ran like a scared wolf across the field, the hog following me like a hound. My father risked a running shot, which missed its

target. The darkies were yelling, "Run, chile! Run, Mars' Reed! Shoot! Shoot!" when it occurred to me that I had a pistol; and pointing it backward as I ran, I blazed away, killing the big fellow in his tracks.

The other occasion was years afterward, when I was a trail foreman at Abilene, Kansas. My herd had arrived at that market in bad condition, gaunted from almost constant stampedes at night, and I had gone into camp some distance from town to quiet and recuperate them. That day I was sending home about half my men, had taken them to the depot with our wagon, and intended hauling back a load of supplies to my camp. After seeing the boys off I hastened about my other business, and near the middle of the afternoon started out of town. The distance to camp was nearly twenty miles, and with a heavy load, principally salt, I knew it would be after nightfall when I reached there. About five miles out of town there was a long, gradual slope to climb, and I had to give the through team their time in pulling to its summit. Near the divide was a small box house, the only one on the road if I remember rightly, and as I was nearing it, four or five dogs ran out and scared my team. I managed to hold them in the road, but they refused to quiet down, kicking, rearing, and plunging in spite of their load; and once as they jerked me forward, I noticed there was a dog or two under the wagon, nipping at their heels. There was a six-shooter lying on the seat beside me, and reaching forward I fired it downward over the end gate of the wagon. By the merest accident I hit a dog, who raised a cry, and the last I saw of him he was spinning like a top and howling like a wolf. I quieted the team as soon as possible, and as I looked back, there was a man and woman pursuing me, the latter in the lead. I had gumption enough to know that they were the owners of the dog, and whipped up the horses in the hope of getting away from them. But the grade and the load were against me, and the next thing I knew, a big, bony woman, with fire in her eye, was reaching for me. The wagon wheel warded her off, and I leaned out of her reach to the far side, yet she kept abreast of me, constantly calling for her husband to hurry up. I was pouring the whip into the horses, fearful lest she would climb into the wagon, when the hub of the front wheel struck her on the knee, knocking her down. I was then nearing the summit of the divide, and on reaching it, I looked back and saw the big woman giving her husband the pommeling that was intended for me. She was altogether too near me yet, and I shook the lines over the horses, firing a few shots to frighten them, and we tore down the farther slope like a fire engine.

There are two events in my life that this chronicle will not fully record. One of them is my courtship and marriage, and the other my connection with a government contract with the Indian department. Otherwise my life shall be as an open book, not only for my own posterity, but that he who runs may read. It has been a matter of observation with me that a plain man like myself scarcely ever refers to his love affairs. At my time of life, now nearing my allotted span, I have little sympathy with the great mass of fiction which exploits the world-old passion. In no sense of the word am I a well-read man, yet I am conscious of the fact that during my younger days the love story interested me; but when compared with

the real thing, the transcript is usually a poor one. My wife and I have now walked up and down the paths of life for over thirty-five years, and, if memory serves me right, neither one of us has ever mentioned the idea of getting a divorce. In youth we shared our crust together; children soon blessed and brightened our humble home, and to-day, surrounded by every comfort that riches can bestow, no achievement in life has given me such great pleasure, I know no music so sweet, as the prattle of my own grandchildren. Therefore that feature of my life is sacred, and will not be disclosed in these pages.

I would omit entirely mention of the Indian contract, were it not that old friends may read this, my biography, and wonder at the omission. I have no apologies to offer for my connection with the transaction, as its true nature was concealed from me in the beginning, and a scandal would have resulted had I betrayed friends. Then again, before general amnesty was proclaimed I was debarred from bidding on the many rich government contracts for cattle because I had served in the Confederate army. Smarting under this injustice at the time the Indian contract was awarded, I question if I was thoroughly _reconstructed._ Before our disabilities were removed, we ex-Confederates could do all the work, run all the risk, turn in all the cattle in filling the outstanding contracts, but the middleman got the profits. The contract in question was a blanket one, requiring about fifty thousand cows for delivery at some twenty Indian agencies. The use of my name was all that was required of me, as I was the only cowman in the entire ring. My duty was to bid on the contract; the bonds would be furnished by my partners, of which I must have had a dozen. The proposals called for sealed bids, in the usual form, to be in the hands of the Department of the Interior before noon on a certain day, marked so and so, and to be opened at high noon a week later. The contract was a large one, the competition was ample. Several other Texas drovers besides myself had submitted bids; but they stood no show--_I had been furnished the figures of every competitor._ The ramifications of the ring of which I was the mere figure-head can be readily imagined. I sublet the contract to the next lowest bidder, who delivered the cattle, and we got a rake-off of a clean hundred thousand dollars. Even then there was little in the transaction for me, as it required too many people to handle it, and none of them stood behind the door at the final "divvy." In a single year I have since cleared twenty times what my interest amounted to in that contract and have done honorably by my fellowmen. That was my first, last, and only connection with a transaction that would need deodorizing if one described the details.

But I have seen life, have been witness to its poetry and pathos, have drunk from the cup of sorrow and rejoiced as a strong man to run a race. I have danced all night where wealth and beauty mingled, and again under the stars on a battlefield I have helped carry a stretcher when the wails of the wounded on every hand were like the despairing cries of lost souls. I have seen an old demented man walking the streets of a city, picking up every scrap of paper and scanning it carefully to see if a certain ship had arrived at port--a ship which had been lost at sea over forty years before, and aboard of which were his wife and

children. I was once under the necessity of making a payment of twenty-five thousand dollars in silver at an Indian village. There were no means of transportation, and I was forced to carry the specie in on eight pack mules. The distance was nearly two hundred miles, and as we neared the encampment we were under the necessity of crossing a shallow river. It was summer-time, and as we halted the tired mules to loosen the lash ropes, in order to allow them to drink, a number of Indian children of both sexes, who were bathing in the river, gathered naked on either embankment in bewilderment at such strange intruders. In the innocence of these children of the wild there was no doubt inspiration for a poet; but our mission was a commercial one, and we relashed the mules and hurried into the village with the rent money.

I have never kept a diary. One might wonder that the human mind could contain such a mass of incident and experiences as has been my portion, yet I can remember the day and date of occurrences of fifty years ago. The scoldings of my father, the kind words of an indulgent mother, when not over five years of age, are vivid in my memory as I write to-day. It may seem presumptuous, but I can give the year and date of starting, arrival, and delivery of over one hundred herds of cattle which I drove over the trail as a common hand, foreman, or owner. Yet the warnings of years--the unsteady step, easily embarrassed, love of home and dread of leaving it--bid me hasten these memoirs. Even my old wounds act as a barometer in foretelling the coming of storms, as well as the change of season, from both of which I am comfortably sheltered. But as I look into the inquiring eyes of a circle of grandchildren, all anxious to know my life story, it seems to sweeten the task, and I am encouraged to go on with the work.

II. My Apprenticeship

During the winter of 1865-66 I corresponded with several of my old comrades in Texas. Beyond a welcome which could not be questioned, little encouragement was, with one exception, offered me among my old friends. It was a period of uncertainty throughout the South, yet a cheerful word reached me from an old soldier crony living some distance west of Fort Worth on the Brazos River. I had great confidence in my former comrade, and he held out a hope, assuring me that if I would come, in case nothing else offered, we could take his ox teams the next winter and bring in a cargo of buffalo robes. The plains to the westward of Fort Griffin, he wrote, were swarming with buffalo, and wages could be made in killing them for their hides. This caught my fancy and I was impatient to start at once; but the healing of my reopened wound was slow, and it was March before I started. My brother gave me a good horse and saddle, twenty-five dollars in gold, and I started through a country unknown to me personally. Southern Missouri had been in sympathy with the Confederacy, and whatever I needed while traveling through that section was mine for the asking. I avoided the Indian Territory until I reached Fort Smith, where I rested several days with an old comrade, who gave me instructions and routed me across the reservation of the Choctaw Indians, and I reached Paris, Texas, without mishap.

I remember the feeling that I experienced while being ferried across Red River. That watercourse was the northern boundary of Texas, and while crossing it I realized that I was leaving home and friends and entering a country the very name of which to the outside world was a synonym for crime and outlawry. Yet some of as good men as ever it was my pleasure to know came from that State, and undaunted I held a true course for my destination. I was disappointed on seeing Fort Worth, a straggling village on the Trinity River, and, merely halting to feed my mount, passed on. I had a splendid horse and averaged thirty to forty miles a day when traveling, and early in April reached the home of my friend in Paolo Pinto County. The primitive valley of the Brazos was enchanting, and the hospitality of the Edwards ranch was typical of my own Virginia. George Edwards, my crony, was a year my junior, a native of the State, his parents having moved west from Mississippi the year after Texas won her independence from Mexico. The elder Edwards had moved to his present home some fifteen years previous, carrying with him a stock of horses and cattle, which had increased until in 1866 he was regarded as one of the substantial ranchmen in the Brazos valley. The ranch house was a stanch one, built at a time when defense was to be considered as well as comfort, and was surrounded by fine cornfields. The only drawback I could see there was that there was no market for anything, nor was there any money in the country. The consumption of such a ranch made no impression on the increase of its herds, which grew to maturity with no demand for the surplus.

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