

Cattle Brands

by

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Drifting North

It was a wet, bad year on the Old Western Trail. From Red River north and all along was herd after herd waterbound by high water in the rivers. Our outfit lay over nearly a week on the South Canadian, but we were not alone, for there were five other herds waiting for the river to go down. This river had tumbled over her banks for several days, and the driftwood that was coming down would have made it dangerous swimming for cattle.

We were expected to arrive in Dodge early in June, but when we reached the North Fork of the Canadian, we were two weeks behind time.

Old George Carter, the owner of the herd, was growing very impatient about us, for he had had no word from us after we had crossed Red River at Doan's crossing. Other cowmen lying around Dodge, who had herds on the trail, could hear nothing from their men, but in their experience and confidence in their outfits guessed the cause--it was water. Our surprise when we came opposite Camp Supply to have Carter and a stranger ride out to meet us was not to be measured. They had got impatient waiting, and had taken the mail buckboard to Supply, making inquiries along the route for the _Hat_ herd, which had not passed up the trail, so they were assured. Carter was so impatient that he could not wait, as he had a prospective buyer on his hands, and the delay in the appearing of the herd was very annoying to him. Old George was as tickled as a little boy to meet us all.

The cattle were looking as fine as silk. The lay-overs had rested them. The horses were in good trim, considering the amount of wet weather we had had. Here and there was a nigger brand, but these saddle galls were unavoidable when using wet blankets. The cattle were twos and threes. We had left western Texas with a few over thirty-two hundred head and were none shy. We could have counted out more, but on some of them the Hat brand had possibly faded out. We went into a cosy camp early in the evening. Everything needful was at hand, wood, water, and grass. Cowmen in those days prided themselves on their outfits, and Carter was a trifle gone on his men.

With the cattle on hand, drinking was out of the question, so the only way to show us any regard was to bring us a box of cigars. He must have brought those cigars from Texas, for they were wrapped in a copy of the Fort Worth "Gazette." It was a month old and full of news. Every man in the outfit read and reread it. There were several train robberies reported in it, but that was common in those days. They had nominated for Governor "The Little Cavalryman," Sol Ross, and this paper estimated that his majority would be at least two hundred thousand. We were all anxious to get home in time to vote for him.

Theodore Baughman was foreman of our outfit. Baugh was a typical trail-boss. He had learned to take things as they came, play the cards as they fell, and not fret himself about little things that could not be helped. If we had been a month behind he would never have thought to explain the why or wherefore to old man Carter. Several years after this, when

he was scouting for the army, he rode up to a herd over on the Chisholm trail and asked one of the tail men: "Son, have you seen anything of about three hundred nigger soldiers?" "No," said the cowboy. "Well," said Baugh, "I've lost about that many."

That night around camp the smoke was curling upward from those cigars in clouds. When supper was over and the guards arranged for the night, story-telling was in order. This cattle-buyer with us lived in Kansas City and gave us several good ones. He told us of an attempted robbery of a bank which had occurred a few days before in a western town. As a prelude to the tale, he gave us the history of the robbers.

"Cow Springs, Kansas," said he, "earned the reputation honestly of being a hard cow-town. When it became the terminus of one of the many eastern trails, it was at its worst. The death-rate amongst its city marshals--always due to a six-shooter in the hands of some man who never hesitated to use it--made the office not over desirable. The office was vacated so frequently in this manner that at last no local man could be found who would have it. Then the city fathers sent to Texas for a man who had the reputation of being a killer. He kept his record a vivid green by shooting first and asking questions afterward.

"Well, the first few months he filled the office of marshal he killed two white men and an Indian, and had the people thoroughly buffaloed. When the cattle season had ended and winter came on, the little town grew tame and listless. There was no man to dare him to shoot, and he longed for other worlds to conquer. He had won his way into public confidence with his little gun. But this confidence reposed in him was misplaced, for he proved his own double both in morals and courage.

"To show you the limit of the confidence he enjoyed: the treasurer of the Cherokee Strip Cattle Association paid rent money to that tribe, at their capital, fifty thousand dollars quarterly. The capital is not located on any railroad; so the funds in currency were taken in regularly by the treasurer, and turned over to the tribal authorities. This trip was always made with secrecy, and the marshal was taken along as a trusted guard. It was an extremely dangerous trip to make, as it was through a country infested with robbers and the capital at least a hundred miles from the railroad. Strange no one ever attempted to rob the stage or private conveyance, though this sum was taken in regularly for several years. The average robber was careful of his person, and could not be induced to make a target of himself for any money consideration, where there was danger of a gun in the hands of a man that would shoot rapidly and carelessly.

"Before the herds began to reach as far north, the marshal and his deputy gave some excuse and disappeared for a few days, which was quite common and caused no comment. One fine morning the good people of the town where the robbery was attempted were thrown into an uproar by shooting in their bank, just at the opening hour. The robbers were none other than our trusted marshal, his deputy, and a cow-puncher who had been led into the deal. When they ordered the officials of the bank to stand in a row with hands up, they were nonplused at their refusal to comply. The attacked party unearthed ugly looking guns and opened fire on the hold-ups instead.

"This proved bad policy, for when the smoke cleared away the cashier, a very popular man, was found dead, while an assistant was dangerously wounded. The shooting, however, had aroused the town to the situation, and men were seen running to and fro with guns. This unexpected refusal and the consequent shooting spoiled the plans of the robbers, so that they abandoned the robbery and ran to their horses.

"After mounting they parleyed with each other a moment and seemed bewildered as to which way they should ride, finally riding south toward what seemed a broken country. Very few minutes elapsed before every man who could find a horse was joining the posse that was forming to pursue them. Before they were out of sight the posse had started after them. They were well mounted and as determined a set of men as were ever called upon to meet a similar emergency. They had the decided advantage of the robbers, as their horses were fresh, and the men knew every foot of the country.

"The broken country to which the hold-ups headed was a delusion as far as safety was concerned. They were never for a moment out of sight of the pursuers, and this broken country ended in a deep coulee. When the posse saw them enter this they knew that their capture was only a matter of time. Nature seemed against the robbers, for as they entered the coulee their horses bogged down in a springy rivulet, and they were so hard pressed that they hastily dismounted, and sought shelter in some shrubbery that grew about. The pursuing party, now swollen to quite a number, had spread out and by this time surrounded the men. They were seen to take shelter in a clump of wild plum brush, and the posse closed in on them. Seeing the numbers against them, they came out on demand and surrendered. Neither the posse nor themselves knew at this time that the shooting in the bank had killed the cashier. Less than an hour's time had elapsed between the shooting and the capture. When the posse reached town on their return, they learned of the death of the cashier, and the identity of the prisoners was soon established by citizens who knew the marshal and his deputy. The latter admitted their identity.

"That afternoon they were photographed, and later in the day were given a chance to write to any friends to whom they wished to say good-by. The cow-puncher was the only one who availed himself of the opportunity. He wrote to his parents. He was the only one of the trio who had the nerve to write, and seemed the only one who realized the enormity of his crime, and that he would never see the sun of another day.

"As darkness settled over the town, the mob assembled. There was no demonstration. The men were taken quietly out and hanged. At the final moment there was a remarkable variety of nerve shown. The marshal and deputy were limp, unable to stand on their feet. With piteous appeals and tears they pleaded for mercy, something they themselves had never shown their own victims. The boy who had that day written his parents his last letter met his fate with Indian stoicism. He cursed the crouching figures of his partners for enticing him into this crime, and begged them not to die like curs, but to meet bravely the fate which he admitted they all deserved. Several of the men in the mob came forward and shook hands with him, and with no appeal to man or his Maker, he was swung into the great Unknown at the end of a rope. Such nerve is seldom met in life, and those that are supposed to have it, when they come face to face with their end, are found lacking

that quality. It is a common anomaly in life that the bad man with his record often shows the white feather when he meets his fate at the hands of an outraged community."

We all took a friendly liking to the cattle-buyer. He was an interesting talker. While he was a city man, he mixed with us with a certain freedom and abandon that was easy and natural. We all regretted it the next day when he and the old man left us.

"I've heard my father tell about those Cherokees," said Port Cole. "They used to live in Georgia, those Indians. They must have been honest people, for my father told us boys at home, that once in the old State while the Cherokees lived there, his father hired one of their tribe to guide him over the mountains. There was a pass through the mountains that was used and known only to these Indians. It would take six weeks to go and come, and to attend to the business in view. My father was a small boy at the time, and says that his father hired the guide for the entire trip for forty dollars in gold. One condition was that the money was to be paid in advance. The morning was set for the start, and my grandfather took my father along on the trip.

"Before starting from the Indian's cabin my grandfather took out his purse and paid the Indian four ten-dollar gold pieces. The Indian walked over to the corner of the cabin, and in the presence of other Indians laid this gold, in plain sight of all, on the end of a log that projected where they cross outside, and got on his horse to be gone six weeks. They made the trip on time, and my father said his first thought, on their return to the Indian village, was to see if the money was untouched. It was. You couldn't risk white folks that way."

"Oh, I don't know," said one of the boys. "Suppose you save your wages this summer and try it next year when we start up the trail, just to see how it will work."

"Well, if it's just the same to you," replied Port, lighting a fresh cigar, "I'll not try, for I'm well enough satisfied as to how it would turn out, without testing it."

"Isn't it strange," said Bat Shaw, "that if you trust a man or put confidence in him he won't betray you. Now, that marshal--one month he was guarding money at the risk of his life, and the next was losing his life trying to rob some one. I remember a similar case down on the Rio Grande. It was during the boom in sheep a few years ago, when every one got crazy over sheep.

"A couple of Americans came down on the river to buy sheep. They brought their money with them. It was before the time of any railroads. The man they deposited their money with had lived amongst these Mexicans till he had forgotten where he did belong, though he was a Yankee. These sheep-buyers asked their banker to get them a man who spoke Spanish and knew the country, as a guide. The banker sent and got a man that he could trust. He was a swarthy-looking native whose appearance would not recommend him anywhere. He was accepted, and they set out to be gone over a month.

"They bought a band of sheep, and it was necessary to pay for them at a point some forty miles further up the river. There had been some robbing along the river, and these men

felt uneasy about carrying the money to this place to pay for the sheep. The banker came to the rescue by advising them to send the money by the Mexican, who could take it through in a single night. No one would ever suspect him of ever having a dollar on his person. It looked risky, but the banker who knew the nature of the native urged it as the better way, assuring them that the Mexican was perfectly trustworthy. The peon was brought in, the situation was explained to him, and he was ordered to be in readiness at nightfall to start on his errand.

"He carried the money over forty miles that night, and delivered it safely in the morning to the proper parties. This act of his aroused the admiration of these sheep men beyond a point of safety. They paid for the sheep, were gone for a few months, sold out their flocks to good advantage, and came back to buy more. This second time they did not take the precaution to have the banker hire the man, but did so themselves, intending to deposit their money with a different house farther up the river. They confided to him that they had quite a sum of money with them, and that they would deposit it with the same merchant to whom he had carried the money before. The first night they camped the Mexican murdered them both, took the money, and crossed into Mexico. He hid their bodies, and it was months before they were missed, and a year before their bones were found. He had plenty of time to go to the ends of the earth before his crime would be discovered.

"Now that Mexican would never think of betraying the banker, his old friend and patron, his *_muy bueno amigo_*. There were obligations that he could not think of breaking with the banker; but these fool sheep men, supposing it was simple honesty, paid the penalty of their confidence with their lives. Now, when he rode over this same road alone, a few months before, with over five thousand dollars in money belonging to these same men, all he would need to have done was to ride across the river. When there were no obligations binding, he was willing to add murder to robbery. Some folks say that Mexicans are good people; it is the climate, possibly, but they can always be depended on to assay high in treachery."

"What guard are you going to put me on to-night?" inquired old man Carter of Baugh.

"This outfit," said Baugh, in reply, "don't allow any tenderfoot around the cattle,--at night, at least. You'd better play you're company; somebody that's come. If you're so very anxious to do something, the cook may let you rustle wood or carry water. We'll fix you up a bed after a little, and see that you get into it where you can sleep and be harmless.

"Colonel," added Baugh, "why is it that you never tell that experience you had once amongst the greasers?"

"Well, there was nothing funny in it to me," said Carter, "and they say I never tell it twice alike."

"Why, certainly, tell us," said the cattle-buyer. "I've never heard it. Don't throw off to-night."

"It was a good many years ago," began old man George, "but the incident is very clear in my mind. I was working for a month's wages then myself. We were driving cattle out of Mexico. The people I was working for contracted for a herd down in Chihuahua, about four hundred miles south of El Paso. We sent in our own outfit, wagon, horses, and men, two weeks before. I was kept behind to take in the funds to pay for the cattle. The day before I started, my people drew out of the bank twenty-eight thousand dollars, mostly large bills. They wired ahead and engaged a rig to take me from the station where I left the railroad to the ranch, something like ninety miles.

"I remember I bought a new mole-skin suit, which was very popular about then. I had nothing but a small hand-bag, and it contained only a six-shooter. I bought a book to read on the train and on the road out, called 'Other People's Money.' The title caught my fancy, and it was very interesting. It was written by a Frenchman,--full of love and thrilling situations. I had the money belted on me securely, and started out with flying colors. The railroad runs through a dreary country, not worth a second look, so I read my new book. When I arrived at the station I found the conveyance awaiting me. The plan was to drive halfway, and stay over night at a certain hacienda.

"The driver insisted on starting at once, telling me that we could reach the Hacienda Grande by ten o'clock that night, which would be half my journey. We had a double-seated buckboard and covered the country rapidly. There were two Mexicans on the front seat, while I had the rear one all to myself. Once on the road I interested myself in 'Other People's Money,' almost forgetful of the fact that at that very time I had enough of other people's money on my person to set all the bandits in Mexico on my trail. There was nothing of incident that evening, until an hour before sundown. We reached a small ranchito, where we spent an hour changing horses, had coffee and a rather light lunch.

"Before leaving I noticed a Pinto horse hitched to a tree some distance in the rear of the house, and as we were expecting to buy a number of horses, I walked back and looked this one carefully over. He was very peculiarly color-marked in the mane. I inquired for his owner, but they told me that he was not about at present. It was growing dusk when we started out again. The evening was warm and sultry and threatening rain. We had been on our way about an hour when I realized we had left the main road and were bumping along on a by-road. I asked the driver his reason for this, and he explained that it was a cut-off, and that by taking it we would save three miles and half an hour's time. As a further reason he expressed his opinion that we would have rain that night, and that he was anxious to reach the hacienda in good time. I encouraged him to drive faster, which he did. Within another hour I noticed we were going down a dry arroyo, with mesquite brush on both sides of the road, which was little better than a trail. My suspicions were never aroused sufficiently to open the little hand-bag and belt on the six-shooter. I was dreaming along when we came to a sudden stop before what seemed a deserted jacal. The Mexicans mumbled something to each other over some disappointment, when the driver said to me:--

"Here's where we stay all night. This is the hacienda.' They both got out and insisted on my getting out, but I refused to do so. I reached down and picked up my little grip and

was in the act of opening it, when one of them grabbed my arm and jerked me out of the seat to the ground. I realized then for the first time that I was in for it in earnest. I never knew before that I could put up such a fine defense, for inside a minute I had them both blinded in their own blood. I gathered up rocks and had them flying when I heard a clatter of hoofs coming down the arroyo like a squadron of cavalry. They were so close on to me that I took to the brush, without hat, coat, or pistol. Men that pack a gun all their lives never have it when they need it; that was exactly my fix. Darkness was in my favor, but I had no more idea where I was or which way I was going than a baby. One thing sure, I was trying to get away from there as fast as I could. The night was terribly dark, and about ten o'clock it began to rain a deluge. I kept going all night, but must have been circling.

"Towards morning I came to an arroyo which was running full of water. My idea was to get that between me and the scene of my trouble, so I took off my boots to wade it. When about one third way across, I either stepped off a bluff bank or into a well, for I went under and dropped the boots. When I came to the surface I made a few strokes swimming and landed in a clump of mesquite brush, to which I clung, got on my feet, and waded out to the opposite bank more scared than hurt. Right there I lay until daybreak.

"The thing that I remember best now was the peculiar odor of the wet mole-skin. If there had been a strolling artist about looking for a picture of Despair, I certainly would have filled the bill. The sleeves were torn out of my shirt, and my face and arms were scratched and bleeding from the thorns of the mesquite. No one who could have seen me then would ever have dreamed that I was a walking depository of 'Other People's Money.' When it got good daylight I started out and kept the shelter of the brush to hide me. After nearly an hour's travel, I came out on a divide, and about a mile off I saw what looked like a jacal. Directly I noticed a smoke arise, and I knew then it was a habitation. My appearance was not what I desired, but I approached it.

"In answer to my knock at the door a woman opened it about two inches and seemed to be more interested in examination of my anatomy than in listening to my troubles. After I had made an earnest sincere talk she asked me, 'No estay loco tu?' I assured her that I was perfectly sane, and that all I needed was food and clothing, for which I would pay her well. It must have been my appearance that aroused her sympathy, for she admitted me and fed me.

"The woman had a little girl of probably ten years of age. This little girl brought me water to wash myself, while the mother prepared me something to eat. I was so anxious to pay these people that I found a five-dollar gold piece in one of my pockets and gave it to the little girl, who in turn gave it to her mother. While I was drinking the coffee and eating my breakfast, the woman saw me looking at a picture of the Virgin Mary which was hanging on the adobe wall opposite me. She asked me if I was a Catholic, which I admitted. Then she brought out a shirt and offered it to me.

"Suddenly the barking of a dog attracted her to the door. She returned breathless, and said in good Spanish: 'For God's sake, run! Fly! Don't let my husband and brother catch you

here, for they are coming home.' She thrust the shirt into my hand and pointed out the direction in which I should go. From a concealed point of the brush I saw two men ride up to the jacal and dismount. One of them was riding the Pinto horse I had seen the day before.

"I kept the brush for an hour or so, and finally came out on the mesa. Here I found a flock of sheep and a pastore. From this shepherd I learned that I was about ten miles from the main road. He took the sandals from his own feet and fastened them on mine, gave me directions, and about night I reached the hacienda, where I was kindly received and cared for. This rancho sent after officers and had the country scoured for the robbers. I was detained nearly a week, to see if I could identify my drivers, without result. They even brought in the owner of the Pinto horse, and no doubt husband of the woman who saved my life.

"After a week's time I joined our own outfit, and I never heard a language that sounded so sweet as the English of my own tongue. I would have gone back and testified against the owner of the spotted horse if it hadn't been for a woman and a little girl who depended on him, robber that he was."

"Now, girls," said Baugh, addressing Carter and the stranger, "I've made you a bed out of the wagon-sheet, and rustled a few blankets from the boys. You'll find the bed under the wagon-tongue, and we've stretched a fly over it to keep the dew off you, besides adding privacy to your apartments. So you can turn in when you run out of stories or get sleepy."

"Haven't you got one for us?" inquired the cattle-buyer of Baugh. "This is no time to throw off, or refuse to be sociable."

"Well, now, that bank robbery that you were telling the boys about," said Baugh, as he bit the tip from a fresh cigar, "reminds me of a hold-up that I was in up in the San Juan mining country in Colorado. We had driven into that mining camp a small bunch of beef and had sold them to fine advantage. The outfit had gone back, and I remained behind to collect for the cattle, expecting to take the stage and overtake the outfit down on the river. I had neglected to book my passage in advance, so when the stage was ready to start I had to content myself with a seat on top. I don't remember the amount of money I had. It was the proceeds of something like one hundred and fifty beeves, in a small bag along of some old clothes. There wasn't a cent of it mine, still I was supposed to look after it.

"The driver answered to the name of South-Paw, drove six horses, and we had a jolly crowd on top. Near midnight we were swinging along, and as we rounded a turn in the road, we noticed a flickering light ahead some distance which looked like the embers of a camp-fire. As we came nearly opposite the light, the leaders shied at some object in the road in front of them. South-Paw uncurled his whip, and was in the act of pouring the leather into them, when that light was uncovered as big as the head-light of an engine. An empty five-gallon oil-can had been cut in half and used as a reflector, throwing full light into the road sufficient to cover the entire coach. Then came a round of orders which meant business. 'Shoot them leaders if they cross that obstruction!' 'Kill any one that gets

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