

JAMES OTIS

PHILIP OF
TEXAS

James Otis
Philip of Texas

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Philip of Texas A Story of Sheep Raising in Texas

FOREWORD

The author of this series of stories for children has endeavored simply to show why and how the descendants of the early colonists fought their way through the wilderness in search of new homes. The several narratives deal with the struggles of those adventurous people who forced their way westward, ever westward, whether in hope of gain or in answer to "the call of the wild," and who, in so doing, wrote their names with their blood across this country of ours from the Ohio to the Columbia.

To excite in the hearts of the young people of this land a desire to know more regarding the building up of this great nation, and at the same time to entertain in such a manner as may stimulate to noble deeds, is the real aim of these stories. In them there is nothing of romance, but only a careful, truthful record of the part played by children in the great battles with those forces, human as well as natural, which, for so long a time, held a vast portion of this broad land against the advance of home seekers.

With the knowledge of what has been done by our own people in our own land, surely there is no reason why one should resort to fiction in order to depict scenes of heroism, daring, and sublime disregard of suffering in nearly every form.

JAMES OTIS.

MY DREAMS OF A SHEEP RANCH

The day I was twelve years old, father gave me twelve ewes out of his flock of seventy-two, counting these sheep as payment for the work I had done in tending them. Even at that time I thought myself a good shepherd, for I was able to keep a small flock well together.

With Gyp, our dog, I could have herded five hundred as readily as I did seventy-two, because on our plantation in Mississippi the pastures were fenced. Therefore when father began to talk of moving to Texas and there making a venture in the cattle business, I decided at once that if he did so, it should be my aim to raise sheep. With this idea I gathered from the neighbors roundabout, who had larger flocks than ours, all the possible information about the business in our own state.

SHEEP RAISING

A sheep in order to thrive should have not less than two acres of fairly good pasturage in which to roam. Much less than that amount of land would provide a sheep with food in case it was inclosed; but on the range, where the flock is turned out to feed over a large extent of country, the animals are inclined to "bunch," as the herders call it; that is, to keep in close company and wander here or there trampling down the grass without eating it.

A sheep will yield about five pounds of wool each year, and you can count that each animal in a herd will give you one dollar's worth of its fleece annually. Of course there is considerable expense, if one is obliged to pay for shearing, or for dipping, in case that disease known as "scab" comes among the flock. I have known a sheep raiser to pay four cents a head to the Mexican shepherds simply for dipping the flock; that is to say, for giving each animal a bath in a certain mixture in order to drive out distemper which, in sheep, is like the mange that comes upon dogs.

Then it is pretty certain that during the year there will be as many lambs born as there are sheep in the flock, and if a sheep is worth five dollars, you can reckon the lamb at three, for it will be a yearling in twelve months, and a full-grown sheep a year later. So one can say that every sheep worth five dollars will bring in a profit of four dollars each year, less the expense of keeping.

HERDING SHEEP

Suppose you have a flock of five hundred sheep. They will "herd," as sheepmen say, which means, keep nearly together, within a space around which a man can ordinarily walk two or three times a day, to prevent the wilder ones from straying.

When the flock is driven out on the range from the pens, they are kept moving a mile or two, while the shepherd walks around the flock, talking to them, so that they may hear his voice; the animals pick up mouthfuls of grass now and then, even while being driven.

In rainy or cold weather, sheep walk much more rapidly than they do when it is warm; therefore the shepherd has more work to do. In very hot, dry weather, they will often not feed in the daytime, but continue eating until late in the night, and then the herder has his work cut out, for those are long days from sunrise until nine or ten o'clock.

But think of the profit of five hundred sheep in one year! Suppose they cost you for herding, shearing, and dipping, in case you cannot manage the flock yourself, three hundred dollars. You get two thousand dollars for the wool and the increase in the flock, and pay out three hundred. This leaves seventeen hundred dollars clear profit in one year from five hundred sheep, and that is not a large flock.

Of course if the scab gets among the sheep, or the Indians kill many, or the wolves can't be kept away, there will be more or less loss which must come out of the seventeen hundred dollars; but take it all in all, unless one has very hard luck, it seems to me he should be able to count on at least a thousand dollars profit from five hundred sheep.

Now it might seem as if this matter of raising sheep, and the profit to be had from them, could have no influence in deciding my going from the state of Mississippi to the republic of Texas, and yet if it had not been for my hope of one day owning a big sheep ranch, I would not have been so delighted when father began to talk of making a new home in that country which had so lately separated from Mexico.

SOMETHING ABOUT TEXAS

One might suppose that my father was a shiftless sort of man to make a change of homes after he had a boy twelve years old; but that is not the fact, as you will understand when I tell you why we sold the plantation in Mississippi, where we were raising fairly good crops of cotton, to embark in the cattle business in Texas.

Of course, it is not necessary for me to relate that the people in Texas declared themselves independent of Mexico in the year 1836, as in 1776 the colonists determined to be free men in a free country, and so broke away from England and England's king.

No doubt you already know that it was on the twenty-second day of April in the year 1836, the day after the battle of San Jacinto, that General Houston captured the Mexican general, Santa Anna; a treaty was then made between Texas and Mexico, which allowed the Texans to become an independent nation. You are also acquainted with the troubles in Texas, when, in the year 1840, the Comanches overran the country, and you have heard of the capture of the town of San Antonio by the Mexicans in September of the year 1842.

LAND GRANTS

All this has little to do with what I am going to tell in regard to my going into the sheep business; yet if all those things had not happened, then President Lamar and President Houston might not have been able to make grants of land to people who were willing to come into the country and build homes.

There were a number of men who succeeded in getting so-called grants from the Texan government. Among these there was a certain Mr. Peters, – I never knew his first name, – who had obtained a grant of an exceedingly large tract of land in the northern part. It was, so father had been told, the best land in Texas; and in order to gain settlers, Mr. Peters agreed to give outright to the head of every family six hundred and forty acres of land, and to each single man three hundred and twenty acres.

Now, of course, my father was the head of a family, although mother and I were the only other members of it; nevertheless he would receive just as many acres of land as though he had a dozen children.

When the matter was first talked about among our neighbors in Mississippi, I hoped I might be counted as a single man; but I was very soon made to understand that a lad of twelve years was mistaken when he reckoned himself of sufficient age to have given him three hundred and twenty acres of land simply for going into a country and living there.

THE "TEXAS FEVER"

Because of this offer by Mr. Peters, the people around us, whose plantations were not particularly valuable, were highly excited, for all had heard how rich was the land in the republic of Texas, and how well it was adapted for cattle raising.

While mother and father were talking the matter over, trying to decide whether they would go into Peters's colony, I heard him tell her that already a great many people from Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky, as well as from our state, had gone there and had sent back the most cheering words regarding the possibility of making money in that new country.

Perhaps I should say that this grant was made to the Peters colony early in the year 1842, but it was not until the spring of the next year that father began to have what some of our neighbors laughingly called the "Texas Fever"; and I took it because of the possibilities of raising sheep.

It was just about this time that the Texans began to talk of being annexed to the United States, for their republic was not so flourishing as many would have liked to see it. The country was in debt to the amount of nearly seven million dollars, so I heard father say, and the people stood in fear of the Mexicans on the one side, who were ever ready to make trouble, and of the Indians on the other, to say nothing of the wild beasts everywhere.

Such a thinly settled country could not raise large armies to fight off their enemies, and those people who had been living for some time in Texas believed that if their republic could become a part of the United States, they would have all the soldiers that were needed to keep peace in the land.

WHY I WANTED TO GO INTO TEXAS

Of all this I knew very little at the time father was talking about making a new home, and I cared less, for my mind was filled entirely with the idea of one day owning a large sheep ranch. From the time I began to take care of father's flock I had heard people, lately come from Texas, declare that that was the one spot in all the wide world where sheep could be raised easily and at small cost.

There were other reasons besides this which caused me to hope that my father would decide to make a change of homes. I had heard that the ponies, which the Texans called mustangs, could be bought for from eight to twenty dollars each, and that they cost no more to keep than ordinary cows, for they did not require grain. Now, in all my life, I had never owned either horse or pony, for the only driving animals on our Mississippi plantation had been mules.

HUNTING IN TEXAS

I had also read that there was much good hunting in Texas, and that one need not go very far afield in order to find plenty of bears; in fact, that there were too many for the comfort of the sheep raisers. I knew also that deer were to be found in large numbers and that there were cougars, which are called Mexican lions, and panthers, together with wildcats and wolves. Fancy such a list of game as that for a fellow who was as fond of shooting as I was!

Then again, one of our neighbors who had been in Texas told me of the wild hogs, or peccaries, as they are sometimes called, that go in droves of from half a dozen to twenty or thirty, and are very fierce when stirred up.

The wolves concerned me most just then, for you know that these animals are exceedingly fond of sheep, and he who herds a flock on the range must keep his eyes wide open for those four-footed enemies. Three kinds of wolves were to be found in Texas: the black wolf which was rare, the coyote, and the lobo or gray wolf. The last two were great sheep stealers and many in number.

It seemed to me then, as it has many times since, that it would be great sport to hunt those sheep eaters and lay up a goodly stock of their pelts, for a wolf hide, when taken in the proper season, makes an excellent bed covering, whether it be in a house or on the open prairie.

From the time that father began to talk of joining Peters's colony, I spent a good portion of my time learning all that was possible concerning this republic, the people of which were eager to come into the United States. I found, as any one can who will make diligent search, the most interesting stories not only about hunting, but about the early troubles between Texas and Mexico, the Texans' fight for independence, and the many Indian raids.

FATHER GOES TO SPY OUT THE LAND

It seemed to me that father and mother spent a great deal of unnecessary time in discussing whether they would change their home from Mississippi to Texas. In fact I was beginning to despair of ever becoming a sheep raiser in the Peters colony, when father suddenly declared that he would go to see the country for himself, and if it was half as good as people said it was, he would lay out his claim of six hundred and forty acres and come back to sell the plantation and move the live stock.

I begged hard to be allowed to go with him, but my request was not to be granted, for although we owned two slaves, John and Zeba, neither of them could be trusted to look after the cattle, the sheep, and the mules.

Therefore it was decided that I should be the head of the family while father was away, and so proud was I over being given such a position of trust, that I failed to grieve, as I otherwise might have done, at not being allowed to go with him.

He set out with a pair of our best mules hitched to a light wagon, intending to drive to Little Rock in Arkansas, and from there to Fort Towson, after which he would make his way across what is now Grayson County, spying out the land.

OUR PLANTATION IN MISSISSIPPI

It was not a very long journey, although he would probably travel two or three hundred miles before turning back. We lived in Bolivar County, in Mississippi, near Indian Point, where, as you know, the Arkansas River joins with the Mississippi.

Our plantation was not well suited to cotton raising, and perhaps for this reason father was all the more willing to listen to those people who had so much to say about Texas, that one could almost believe it to be a veritable Promised Land. Father had set out to raise cattle, although our plantation was no better adapted for such a purpose, perhaps, than it was for cotton raising. We had about seventy head of oxen, and twenty mules, together with the seventy-two sheep which made up my own and my father's flocks. I did not realize that the profits from sheep raising in Texas might not be the same as in Mississippi.

I counted the days while father was away, thinking with each sunrise that I would see him again before nightfall. After he had been gone two or three weeks I was foolish enough to wander up the road now and then, hoping to meet him on his return, and be the first to hear the good news.

FATHER COMES HOME

He had been absent nearly six weeks, and my heart had almost grown sick with waiting, when late one night, after I had gone to bed, I heard a commotion downstairs, followed by shouts for John or Zeba, and then I recognized my father's voice.

There is little need for me to say that I tumbled, rather than ran, down the stairs, so great was my eagerness to learn the result of his visit into Texas, and even before he had had time to take me in his arms I insisted on knowing whether he had staked out his claim.

In a few words he quieted my impatience by telling me we would set off for the new country as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made. So far as the details were concerned I was willing to wait, for the matter had been settled as I hoped it would be.

Later, I learned that our new home was to be on the West Fork of the Trinity River, where, so father said, the land was better suited for cattle or sheep raising than any other he had ever seen.

As a matter of fact he was even more delighted with the prospect of going to Texas than I was, and at once mother fell in with the plan heartily. She knew he would not have been so pleased at taking up a claim, unless it seemed certain we could better our position very greatly, for he was a home-loving man, and would not have moved from our plantation had he not felt reasonably sure of making a change for the better.

He told us that people from the United States, and even from across the sea in France, were going in great numbers to Texas, and he had no doubt but that as soon as it was made one of the states of the Union, it would prosper beyond any land of which we had ever heard.

THE BIGNESS OF TEXAS

Then he began to tell us how large the republic of Texas was, and before he had finished I was filled with astonishment, for, without having given any great thought to the matter, I had fancied it might, perhaps, be somewhere near the size of our state of Mississippi.

He told us that Texas was much larger than the countries of Sweden and Norway together, three times the size of Great Britain and Ireland, and nearly twice as large as France. He also said that the area of all the New England and Middle States was considerably less than that of Texas.

Imagine such an extent of territory open to new settlers! A republic nearly eight times as large as the state of New York, nine times as large as the state of Ohio, and six times as large as all New England put together!

There was no longer any surprise in my mind that the people who made up the government of Texas would be willing to give six hundred and forty acres to every man with a family who would settle there, when, within their boundaries, they had more than two hundred million acres.

WHERE WE WERE GOING

Talk of sheep raising, and giving two acres to each sheep! If, before father went away, I had been eager to own a sheep ranch in Texas, then certainly I was nearly wild with the idea after he returned, for from his stories I began to understand that one could own thousands upon thousands, and yet find ample room to feed them all.

We were not going, so it seemed, into the best portion of the republic for sheep raising, but rather into the northern part, while the finest grazing lands were on the western side, or in that oddly shaped piece which is called the "Panhandle."

However, I was well satisfied if we could not have the best of the sheep-raising business, if only we might embark in it anywhere.

Again I was contented because we were going into the northern part, rather than to the westward, owing to the stories father told of an enormous colony of Frenchmen which was being brought over the sea by a gentleman whose name was Castro. Mr. Henry Castro was a very wealthy Frenchman, who had been appointed by the Texan government as Consul General to France. Having been given a grant of land by the government, he agreed to bring over a large number of people from his native country, paying all their expenses of traveling, and lending each man sufficient money to set himself up as a ranchman. Already, it was said, he had seven hundred people on seven different ships which he had hired at his own cost, and these colonists would soon be set down in Texas to make their way as best they might with his assistance.

WHAT I HOPED TO DO

I was only twelve years old, and already owned twelve ewes. Now I well knew from what I had heard sheep raisers say, that if I attended to my little flock properly, and if they met with no accident, it would be nothing marvelous if, at the end of nine years, when I should be twenty-one, my flock had increased to five thousand, or even more.

Father had hardly finished telling mother and me of what he had seen during his journey, before we began to make preparations for moving. Surely it seemed to me we were likely to have good luck, for within eight and forty hours after he returned, a man came up from Baton Rouge to buy our plantation, having heard that father was suffering with the Texas fever. Within two hours after he showed his willingness to buy our land the bargain was made, a fairly large portion of the money paid over, and mother and I knew that within twenty days we should leave the home where I was born.

CATTLE DRIVING

Perhaps my heart grew just a bit faint when I learned that it would be necessary to drive all our cattle and sheep from Bolivar County into Texas, and that I was expected to do a large share of the work. Father thought that John, Zeba, and I should be able to keep the cattle on the road, for we were to follow the highway the entire distance, and he intended to hire three slaves from our neighbors to drive the mules which would haul all our household belongings.

There was no question in my mind but that we would get along easily with the oxen and the cows. Father decided to harness most of the mules to three wagons, so they could be handled by the hired negroes; but the question of how we would be able to get the sheep along worried me much. Whoever has had charge of such animals knows well that it is not a simple task to drive them over a strange country, however quiet they may have been on feeding grounds with which they are acquainted.

But no good could come from my worrying as to how we might get into Texas. I would soon know by experience. In fact, I had little time to concern myself about anything whatsoever save the work on hand, because in order to be ready to leave the plantation within twenty days, all of us found plenty with which to occupy our hands.

It really seemed to me as if Gyp knew exactly what we were planning to do, for he walked around at my heels day after day, with his tail hanging between his legs, as though ashamed that he was about to leave the United States for a new country, where he would see a flag which bore but a single star.

HOW WE SET OUT

There was so much bustle and confusion on the plantation during the short time left to us that I hardly remember how we made ready; but I do know that we were finally prepared for the journey, and that John and Zeba set off with the cattle twenty-four hours before father, mother, and I left home, in order that the creatures might become somewhat accustomed to traveling by the time we overtook them.

We had three wagons covered with heavy cloth, each drawn by six mules, and loaded with all our provisions, clothing, and such farming tools as we wanted to take with us.

The other two mules were harnessed to the wagon in which father had made the journey to Texas, and in this mother was to travel, father riding with her when he was not needed elsewhere.

My mother was a good horsewoman, and the handling of two, or even four, mules would not have troubled her in the slightest. Therefore she said to me laughingly when Gyp and I had gathered the sheep into one corner of the stable yard, ready to set off just behind the mule teams, that her part of the journey would be much like a pleasure trip, while to my share must come a goodly portion of dust and toil.

Father had hired from one of the neighbors three of his best negroes, who were to drive the mule teams, and who could be trusted to come back alone from Texas as soon as their work had been finished.

So it was that we had in our party two grown white people, one boy, five negroes, and Gyp. I am counting the dog as a member of the company, for before we arrived at the West Fork of the Trinity River he showed himself to be of quite as much importance, and of even more service, than either the white or the colored men.

A LABORIOUS JOURNEY

John and Zeba managed to get along with the cattle very well; but the drivers of the mule teams were not so skillful in handling the animals as father had expected, and the result was that he found it necessary to take the place of one or the other nearly all the time, thus leaving mother alone.

Sometimes I led the procession; at other times I trudged on in the rear where the dust was thickest, running first on one side of the road and then on the other, to keep the sheep from straying, and succeeded in holding them to the true course only by the aid of my dog, who had more sound common sense in that shaggy body of his than the brightest lad I have ever come across. Gyp was a willing worker, and a cheery companion at all times. He would run here and there regardless of the heat, and when the sheep were partly straightened up as they should be, come back panting, his red tongue lolling out, and looking up at me with a world of love in his big brown eyes, as if to ask why I was so solemn, or why I could not find, as he did, some sport in thus driving a flock of silly sheep to Texas.

During the journey we halted wherever night over-took us, sometimes camping in the open and finding our beds in one of the wagons, or again herding our cattle in the stable yard of a tavern.

As for food, we got it as best we could. When fortune favored us and we came upon a tavern, we had enough to satisfy our hunger, and in very many places as good as we could have had at the old home in Bolivar County. At other times we ate from the store of provisions we carried, cooking the food by the roadside, while the sheep and the cattle, too tired to stray very far after so many miles of plodding, fed eagerly on whatever grass they were lucky enough to find.

Gyp was my bedfellow, whether I slept in one of the wagons or at a tavern, and before we had crossed the Red River I found myself treating him as I would have treated a lad of my own age, and time and time again I thought to myself that he understood all I said to him.

COMANCHE INDIANS

Before we left the old home I firmly believed we would meet with strange adventures on our long journey, and each morning when we set out, I driving the sheep, with Gyp running to and fro to make certain my work was done properly, I felt convinced that before night came something out of the ordinary would take place. Yet until we came near to Fort Towson I saw nothing more strange or entertaining than I might have seen on the banks of the Mississippi River, but when we were within two miles or more of the fort, and the sheep and I were leading the way, we suddenly came upon a band of seven Comanche Indians, the first of the tribe I had ever seen. They were all mounted, no one of them wearing more clothing than the breech-cloth around his waist, and at least two of them armed with what I believed to be serviceable rifles.

It was as if the fellows had come up out of the very ground, so suddenly did they appear. Although I could not have understood their language if any attempt had been made to open a conversation, it was plain to me that they intended to take possession of my sheep as well as of those belonging to father, while I did not doubt but that they would make quick work of me.

FATHER COMES TO MY RESCUE

It is more than likely that all my fears might have been realized had the remainder of our party been very far in the rear, for I believe the savages thought I was alone on the road, driving the flock to Fort Towson where it could be slaughtered; but at the very moment when two of the most villainous of the party dismounted and came toward me with their rifles in hand, father and mother drove up in the two-mule team.

Immediately the savages drew back until they had regained their horses, which were being held meanwhile by the other members of the party.

Father was out of the wagon in a twinkling, with a pistol in each hand and coming rapidly toward me, shouting for those in the rear to hurry on, as if he had a large company at his back.

The Indians did not wait to learn how strong we were in numbers, and more than likely they saw the cloud of dust in the distance which told of the coming of the cattle and the loaded wagons; perhaps they believed it was raised by a troop of men, for without parley, and before one could have counted ten, they had wheeled about and were riding at their best pace in the opposite direction.

So great was my relief of mind that I felt inclined to make light of the adventure, but was straightway sobered when father said gravely: —

"There is much to be feared from those rascally Comanches. The only reason I have not already cautioned you often and very strongly is because I feared to alarm your mother. Do not take any chances if, when you are alone, you come upon such as those who have just fled, but seek safety in flight if possible. If you cannot escape, make ready for a desperate defense, and even when you are on our claim, have your weapons always ready for use."

So intent had I been in planning what might be done in raising sheep, that the possibility of having trouble with the Indians never came into my mind; but now that father had spoken as he did, I knew that beyond a doubt there was good reason for caution, if not for alarm.

Straightway my thoughts went out into the future, as I asked myself how it would be possible, while herding sheep, to defend myself, for I well understood that only Gyp and I could be spared to play the part of shepherds. All the others would be attending to the regular work of the ranch, and could not be expected to give heed to me.

THE ARRIVAL AT FORT TOWSON

I was still turning this unpleasant prospect over in my mind when we arrived at Fort Towson, and then I began to believe the country of Texas was not all I had fancied. It was only reasonable for a lad like me to expect that at this fort I would find something which resembled a fortification, and yet, so far as could be judged from the outside, it was no more than the ordinary buildings of a ranchman, except that walls of sun-dried bricks connected the several structures, forming a square. On the side facing the south were two heavy gates of logs, which now swung wide open, but it was plain to be seen that they could be closed quickly if need arose.

There were in charge of this ranchlike fort no more than six or seven men, and of these, two were Mexicans, while all wore the same gaudy costumes that may be seen in every Spanish settlement.

PREPARING FOR A STORM

It was yet early in the afternoon when we came to this halting place. We had no reason to complain of our reception, for the man who appeared to be the leader of the company came out even before we were ready to enter the inclosure, and said, while John and Zeba were driving the cattle to what seemed good pasturage, that it would be better for us if we herded the stock inside the fort.

This caused me some surprise, for since early morning the air had been so calm that a feather would not have been blown from a tree top, and the weather was warm and sultry, giving promise of discomfort if one were shut within the four walls of the fort.

I fancy even father was astonished because the man invited us inside when it was almost suffocatingly hot on the open prairie. Seeing that we hesitated, the leader of the small garrison pointed toward the west, where could be seen a few low-hanging, sluggish clouds drifting slowly here and there, while at the same time I thought I saw a yellow smudge low down on the northern horizon.

"It's a norther," the man said as if believing he had explained matters sufficiently. When father still hesitated, he added, "Your cattle will be stampeded when the wind comes, unless you have them corralled, and there is not time for you to get the wagons in position."

I did not understand even then, for I had never been told anything whatsoever regarding these strange storms which are called "northers" by Texans, but I noticed that father ran at full speed to give orders for John and Zeba to turn the cattle into the fort, and as he went he shouted for me to herd the sheep within the inclosure.

The man who had bidden us welcome aided me in the task, and more than that, for when the sheep were snugly inside, he ran back to tell the drivers of the wagons to get their mules unhooked and in a safe place before the wind came.

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