

BENTON FRANK

COWBOY LIFE
ON THE
SIDETRACK

Frank Benton
Cowboy Life on the Sidetrack

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24168508

*Cowboy Life on the Sidetrack Being an Extremely Humorous & Sarcastic
Story of the Trials & Tribulations Endured by a Party of Stockmen Making a
Shipment from the West to the East.:*

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| DEDICATION | 4 |
| PREFACE | 6 |
| CHAPTER I. | 8 |
| CHAPTER II. | 14 |
| CHAPTER III. | 18 |
| CHAPTER IV. | 21 |
| CHAPTER V. | 26 |
| CHAPTER VI. | 29 |
| CHAPTER VII. | 32 |
| CHAPTER VIII. | 37 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 40 |

Frank Benton
Cowboy Life on the Sidetrack
Being an Extremely Humorous
& Sarcastic Story of the
Trials & Tribulations
Endured by a Party of
Stockmen Making a Shipment
from the West to the East

DEDICATION

*For justice no shipper e'er asked in vain
From George H. Crosby or C. J. Lane.
We go to them, as to our dad,
When on their road our run is bad,
And when we think the freight too large
Ask them to rebate the overcharge.
No matter which road you give your freight,
To both these friends, this book I dedicate.*

F. B.

PREFACE

To the readers of this little booklet: I wish to say that while some things in the story seem over-drawn, yet I have endeavored to write it entirely from a cowboy standpoint.

To the sheepmen of the West: I want to say that I couldn't have written this story true to the cowboys' character without making a great many reflections on sheepmen, and I want to tender my apologies in advance for anything they may consider offensive, as some of my old-time and dearest friends in the West are among the large sheep owners. But I have been a cowboy and worked with the cowboys for thirty-two years, and have written the things set down here just as they came from the cowboys' lips on a stock train as we were waiting on sidetracks. The names of the cowboys used are the actual nicknames of cowpunchers whom I worked with on Wyoming ranges twenty years ago, and will be recognized by lots of old-timers.

The statement has been frequently made by newspapers that this volume was written as a roast on the Union Pacific railroad. I wish to correct that impression by saying that I selected that road for the groundwork of this story to give them a good advertisement free in requital for the many courtesies extended to me in times past by the officials of the road, for whom I have the warmest friendship.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I.

The Start

I met a man from Utah the other day by the name of Joe Smith, and he gave me quite an interesting history of his shipping some cattle to market over the great Overland route from Utah to South Omaha. I shall tell it in his own language. He said:

I don't want to misstate anything, and I don't want to exaggerate anything, but will tell you the plain facts.

When I and my neighbors, old Chuckwagon, Packsaddle Jack, Eatumup Jake and Dillbery Ike got into the ranch with a drive of cattle we found that three railroad live stock agents, two representatives of the union stockyards and five commission house drummers had been staying at the ranch for a week waiting to get our shipment. Each one took each of us aside and gave us a dirty private as to what they would do for us. Every one of the commission house drummers said their house was second last month in number of cars of live stock in their market and they were looking for them to be first this month; said their salesmen always beat the other firms 10 cents a hundred on even splits, and their yardmen always got the best fill on the cattle. We went off by ourselves to talk it over and make up our minds which firm to ship to. Packsaddle Jack said it was remarkable that they all told the same story, said it was confusing as nary one of them

had mentioned a point but what all the rest had coppered the same bet. Dillbery Ike gave it as his opinion that they were the bummiest lot of liars he ever see. Old Chuckwagon and Eatumup Jake now compared notes and discovered that all the drummers were out of whiskey, but each drummer claimed the other dead beats had drank his up. Old Chuckwagon took a blue downhearted fit of melancholy on seeing they was all out of whiskey and wouldn't decide on any of them. Eatumup Jake just chewed a piece of dried rawhide and wouldn't talk. Packsaddle Jack and me finally decided to bill the cattle to ourselves till we got some further light on the subject.

As the great Overland agent agreed that his road would run us all the way to market at the rate of forty miles an hour and the other live stock agents couldn't promise only thirty-five miles an hour, we gave the shipment to the Overland. The Overland agent went right into town to have the cars greased and sanded ready to start. We followed in with the cattle. It took us about seven days to drive the cattle in, and when we got there the cars were coming – but hadn't arrived. We waited around nine days, grazing the steers on sage brush in daytime and penning them nights till they got so thin we had about concluded to drive back and keep them for another year, when the cars came. It seemed the railroad had got them pretty near out to us once, but had run short of tonnage cars, so just had to haul them back and forth several times over one division to make up their tonnage for the trains. This was very annoying to the railroad men as well as ourselves, but they

had their orders to not let any California fruit spoil on the road and to haul their tonnage, so just had to use these stock cars. It seems Harriman and Hill and J. P. Morgan and all the other boys who own the western railroads are very particular about every train hauling its full tonnage, and I heard there was places they had a lot of scrap iron close to the track, so if the train was short a ton or so they could load it on, haul it to some place where there was some freight to take the place of it, and then unload it for trains going the other way that were short on tonnage.

Finally we got the cattle loaded and our contract signed. Got a basket of grub, as we were informed there would be no time to get meals on the road. It is to this basket of grub that we all owe our lives to-day, so I will give a partial description of the contents. First, we had four dozen bottles of beer; next, eight quarts of old rye whiskey; next, two corkscrews, a hard boiled egg, a sandwich without any meat in it and a bottle of mustard, as Dillbery Ike said he always wanted mustard. Eatumup Jake was for getting a can of tomatoes, but old Chuckwagon said he never had been empty of canned tomatoes in twenty years and wanted one chance to get them out his system.

Well, we got on the way-car, were hitched on to the cattle train and off at last for the first sidetrack, which was a quarter of a mile from the stockyards. The conductor said we would start right away soon as he got his orders, so Chuckwagon proposed we open the lunch, which meeting with direct approval from the entire party, we proceeded to consume a large section of it, and

then went to sleep. When we woke up the sun was sinking in the east, at least I maintained it was east, but Packsaddle Jack said it was in the north. Anyway we argued till it sunk, and never did agree. But we found we were on the same old sidetrack, and as our lunch was about gone we made up a jackpot and sent Dillbery Ike after more lunch. Packsaddle Jack went up and interviewed the agent in the meantime, as he was the only one left in the party who was on speaking terms with that functionary, and found out they were holding us there for the arrival of eight cars of sheep that was expected to come by trail from Idaho. These sheep belong to Rambolet Bill and old Cottswool Canvasback, and these two gentlemen had seen a cloud of dust ten miles away about noon and insisted on having the train held, as they were sure the sheep were coming, which finally proved to be correct. So when they got them loaded, about 11 o'clock that night, we quit quarrelling with the agent, stopped making threats against the railroad superintendent, got Dillbery Ike to put on his coat (he had kept it off all evening to whip the railroad agent who was to blame undoubtedly for all this delay), and finally started, with rising spirits. But as we got up to the depot where the conductor was waiting with his final papers, the head brakeman reported a cow was down up near the engine, and we all walked up there and found that one of Dillbery Ike's critters had become so weak and emaciated that it had succumbed right in the start. We prodded her, and hollered and yelled, and Chuckwagon twisted her tail clear off before we discovered she was stiff and cold in death

and consequently couldn't respond to our suggestions. Dillbery asked the advice of a hobo (who was giving us pointers how to get her up before we discovered her dead condition) about suing the railroad company for her. The hobo agreed to act as witness and swear to anything after Dillbery gave him a nip out of his bottle; and after we found out what a good fellow the hobo was, how much he knew about shipping cattle and that he wanted to go east, we concluded to put his name on the contract and make him one of the party. We asked his name and he said 'twas most always John Doe, but we nicknamed him Jackdo for short.

We all went back to the way-car and started up to the switch and back on to a sidetrack, as No. 1 was expected to arrive pretty soon, as she was four hours late, and was liable to come any time after she got four hours late.

After taking some lunch we lay down on the seats and went to sleep, Jackdo, Rambolet Bill and Cottswool Canvasback on one side of the car, and Dillbery Ike, Chuckwagon, Packsaddle Jack, Eatumup Jake and myself on the other side. It was rather crowded on our side of the car, but none of us liked the perfume that Jackdo and the two sheepmen used. About the time we got to sleep the brakeman came in, woke us all up so he could get into the coal and kindling which is under the seat in a way-car. It was warm weather, but the train crews always build roaring fires in hot weather on stock trains, and he was only following the usual custom. We got our places again and dropped off to sleep. The conductor came in, woke us all up to punch our contracts.

We went to sleep again; the conductor came around, roused us all up to know where we wanted our stock fed. Jackdo now gave us a great deal of advice about where to feed and how much, but Dillbery said the cattle had got used to going without feed so long that it wasn't worth while to waste time feeding them now. Jackdo said all the stockmen fed plenty of hay to their stock all the way to Omaha, but never let them have any water till they got there, as they would get a big fill that way. We finally went to sleep again. The conductor and brakeman took turns jumping down out of their high airy cab on top of the car (where they keep a window open) to build up the fire and see that all the doors and windows below were tightly closed so the stockmen couldn't get no air, but hot air. However, we had been getting hot air from the railroad live stock agents and commission house drummers for some time and slept on till old Chuckwagon begun to snore and woke us up again. It seemed he was having a fearful nightmare, and we had all we could do to keep him from jumping off the train till we got him fairly awake. But after we had each given him a drink from our private bottles he gave several long, shuddering, shivering sighs and told us his dream.

CHAPTER II.

Chuckwagon's Dream

He said he dreamed he was in a deep narrow canyon, and it seemed to be a very hot day, and he thought he walked in the broiling hot sun for miles and miles, his mouth and throat parched with thirst and his eyes almost bursting from their sockets with the heat, when all at once he heard the low mutterings of thunder and he knew there was a storm approaching. The thunder kept growing louder and louder, and he looked around for some shelter and discovered a narrow crevice in the rocks, and just as the storm broke he entered this crevice. He hadn't no more than got inside when he saw a wild animal approaching the same place of refuge. It was bigger than any two grizzly bears he ever saw in his life, but was black with white stripes down its back, had a large bushy tail, and he knew he was up against the biggest skunk the world had ever known, and trembling with horror he crept farther and farther back into the crevice till he was stopped by a stream of red molten fire that seemed to be flowing across his path in the mountain. He was about to retreat, but as he turned to retrace his steps the immense Jumbo skunk was coming in the crevice backwards, with its enormous tail reared over its back, and while the crevice seemed only just large enough for him, yet this great animal had

a way of flattening himself out that, while he was a great deal taller than before, yet did he keep forcing himself gradually back towards poor Chuck. Chuckwagon said he knew that if the skunk was disturbed he would discharge that terrible effluvia that is known the world over, yet the heat from the molten stream of fire was so great that it burned his face and he was obliged to keep it turned towards the skunk. Finally the animal had backed so far that the top of Chuckwagon's head was just under the root of the skunk's tail. Then something commenced to annoy the animal in front, and it started to back a little farther. It was then he gave that despairing, blood-curdling, soul-freezing yell that woke us up, and he said he could still smell that awful effluvia even now that he was awake; but we told him it was just the heat of the car and the perfume that Jackdo and the two sheepmen had.

We now discovered that the train was in motion. We were in doubt a long time, but after marking fence posts, setting up a line of sticks and testing it by all the known devices, we became convinced that it was really a fact, and when there was no longer any doubt left in our minds we fell on each other's necks and sobbed for joy. We tapped four fresh bottles in succession to celebrate the event and shook one another's hands repeatedly. But, alas! in the midst of our rejoicing we came to a sidetrack.

It seems to be one of the rules of railroading to never pass a sidetrack with a stock train till they find out whether that particular train will fit that sidetrack. This sidetrack was 2,125 feet and 223 inches long and our train just fit it like it had been

made a purpose. If our train had been three feet longer it would have been too long for this sidetrack, and we had a long heated argument whether the train had been made for this sidetrack or the sidetrack designed for this special train; but, anyway, I never saw a better fit, and it shows what mechanical heads railroad men have got. We became attached to this sidetrack, and for a long time had the sole use of it. We held it against all comers, trains of empty cars going west, gravel cars and even handcars, but finally had to leave it, and it was with feelings of sadness and regret that we at last had to bid it good-bye. Although we had many sidetracks afterwards, yet as this one was the first we had entirely to ourselves we hated to give it up and our eyelashes were wet with unshed tears as we blew the last kisses from our finger tips when it slowly faded from our sight around a narrow bend in the roadbed. How long it remained true to us we never knew, probably not long, as it was a lonely spot and undoubtedly was occupied by another stock train as soon as we were out of sight.

While at this sidetrack we took a stroll over the hills one day and found a sage hen's nest with the old hen setting. Dillbery Ike slipped up, grasped her by the tail and in her struggle to free herself she lost all her tail feathers and got away. Dillbery tied a string around the tail feathers and took them along. This, as it turned out afterwards, was very fortunate, as we were able by the feathers to settle a dispute that might have led to serious consequences, which happened in this way: Some time after the sage hen episode, while we were waiting on a sidetrack one

day for a gravel train going west, and having had nothing to eat for a long time but mustard on ice, we had become very much discouraged and had even tried to buy Cottswool Canvasback's coat to make soup of, when Jackdo discovered a flock of half-grown young sage chickens feeding along past the train, and immediately we were all out, filled our hats with rocks and commenced to knock them over. We managed to kill the most of them along with the old mother bird, and made the startling discovery that she had lost her tail feathers. We showed her to the division superintendent, who came along in his private car just then and stopped to explain some of the delays on our run, and told him the story of Dillbery pulling out her tail when she was setting. The superintendent argued it couldn't be the same hen, but when Dillbery got the bunch of tail feathers they just fitted in the holes in the poor old bird's rump and that settled the dispute. There was another little incident occurred afterwards that shows the world isn't so large after all. One day while we were waiting on a sidetrack a mud turtle came strolling by, and as Jackdo had suggested turtle soup for old Chuckwagon, who, by the way, had been feeling bad ever since the night he had the skunk dream, not being able to keep anything on his stomach, we captured the turtle and on examining a peculiar mark on the back of its shell discovered it was Dillbery Ike's brand that he had playfully burnt into the animal the day before we left the ranch with the cattle.

CHAPTER III.

Grazing the Sheep

It's not generally known that when sheep get extremely hungry they eat the wool off one another, but nevertheless this is a fact, and Cottswool Canvasback and Rambolet Bill's sheep had long ere this devoured all the wool off each other's backs, but we had had a couple good warm showers of rain and the wool had started up again and was high enough for pretty fair grazing, so the two sheepmen were middlin' easy, as they had a receipt for cooking jackrabbits so they wouldn't shrink in the cooking. They claimed that Manager Gleason of the Warren Live Stock Company had invented this receipt. However, lambing season had come on and Cottswool and Rambolet were kept pretty busy as double deck cars was very cramped quarters to lamb in. Rambolet wanted to unload the sheep, and when they got through lambing to drive them to Laramie City and catch the train again, but Cottswool Canvasback said they would have to pay the same tariff for the cars and insisted on the railroad company earning their money.

Jackdo Sings "Home, Sweet Home."

I remember a pathetic little incident that occurred about this time. When we were waiting on a sidetrack one evening

I suggested to Jackdo that he sing us a song to while away the time, and he started in singing "Home, Sweet Home," in a choked-by-cinders sort of voice, and he hadn't been singing long before I discovered old Chuckwagon and Dillbery Ike lying face downward on the seats sobbing like their hearts would break. Chuck and Dillbery didn't have much of a home, as they batched in little dobe shacks away out on the edge of the plains; but that old song, even if sung by a hoot owl, would make a stockman weep when he is on a stock train and has got about half-way to market. However, it didn't seem to affect Eatumup Jake much, and yet Jake had married a big, buxom, red-headed Mormon girl about six weeks before we started to ship. While Jake looked like he was in delicate health when we left home, yet he had grown strong and hearty on the trip in spite of the privations and sufferings we had to go through, and was pretty near always whistling in a lively way "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

We now arrived at a town. It was about two o'clock in the morning and the conductor roused us up to tell us we would have to change way-cars, as they didn't go any farther. We asked him which way to go when we got off, and he said go anyway we wanted to. We asked him where our car was that we would go out on, and he said, "Damfino." So we started out to hunt it. This was a division station, there were hundreds of cars in every direction and they had put us off a mile from the depot. We begged piteously from everyone we met to tell us where the way-car was that went out on the stock train. We carried our

luggage back and forth, fell over switch frogs in the darkness and skinned our shins, fell over one another trying to keep out the way of switch engines, ran ourselves out of breath after brakemen, conductors, engineers and car oilers, but everyone of them gave us the same stereotyped answer, "Damfino." At last we started out to hunt up the stock again, but just as we found it they started to switching. However, we climbed on the sides of the cars and hung on, all but poor old Chuckwagon, who had been sorter under the weather and wasn't quite quick enough. But he chased manfully after us till we came to a switch, when we dashed past him going the other way. We hollered to him to follow the train, which he did, but only to find us going the other way again. And thus we kept on. How long this would have lasted I don't know, for old Chuck was game to the death and had throwed away his coat, vest, hat and boots and was bound to catch them stock cars, and the switchman and engineer was bound he shouldn't. But finally the engine had to stop for coal and water, and they shoved us in on a sidetrack, went off to bed and left us there till 10 o'clock the next day. But I never shall forget the anguish and horror we endured for fear we wouldn't find that way-car and they would pull the stock out and leave us there. Packsaddle Jack gave it as his opinion that the railroad people had plotted to do that, but we frustrated their designs by getting on the stock cars and staying with them. We all believed Packsaddle Jack was right, but since that time I've talked with a good many cattlemen and found out that's the way they treat everybody.

CHAPTER IV.

Letters from Home

Brought by Immigrants

We arrived at Hawlins, Wyoming, one bright sunny morning and planned to get a square meal there and kinder clean up and take a shave. But this was a sheep town and full of sheepmen and the odor of sheep was so strong we just stopped long enough to fill our bottles and then sauntered on ahead of our train, expecting to get on when it overtook us. Well, we sauntered and sauntered, looking back from every hill, but no train, and finally when we were tired from walking in the heat and dust we found a shade tree, and, laying down, went to sleep. How long we slept I don't know, but when we awoke it was night. In the darkness we had hard work finding our way back to the railroad track, and for a while were undecided which way to go, but finally took the wrong direction, and after plodding along in the dark for several miles we came on top a high hill and saw the lights of the town below us that we left that morning. We now held a council as to who should go down to town to get our bottles filled. Jackdo offered to go, but we had already discovered we couldn't trust him on that kind of errand, as the bottles would be just as empty when he got back as when he started, so finally we sent Eatumup Jake and told him to inquire if our train was still there

or had gone sneaking by us when we were asleep. Jake returned about midnight with the refreshments and the information that the train was on ahead. So we started after it, exchanging ideas along the route as to how far we would have to walk before we came to a sidetrack, as we didn't doubt for a moment we would find the stock on the first siding it could get in on. This was one of the pleasantest nights we had on our whole trip, with good fresh air (we made the sheepmen and Jackdo walk about three miles ahead of us and the wind was blowing in their direction) and nothing to worry us. We talked of home and speculated as to how many calves the boys at home had branded for us on their annual roundups since we left.

Finally Chuckwagon stopped and sniffed a time or two and said he was satisfied the sheepmen and Jackdo must have found the train. After we walked a mile further we came to the sheepmen and Jackdo setting down at a sidetrack, but the stock train was not there. We were much puzzled at this, but after a great deal of argument Eatumup Jake, who had studied Arithmetic some, proposed to measure the sidetrack. He suggested as the only possible solution to the train not being there that probably the track was too short for the train. The trouble now was to get some proper thing to measure with. Finally we took Eatumup Jake's pants which he had removed for the purpose, they being thirty-four inches inseam. By taking the end of each leg they measured sixty-eight inches, or five feet eight inches, to a measurement. Every time we made a measurement

Dillbery put a pebble in his pocket for feet and Chuckwagon put one in his for inches. When we got through we made a light out of some sticks and counted the pebbles. Dillbery had 292 and Chuckwagon 287. They both insisted they had made no mistake, so we had to measure it all over again. There had come up a little flurry of snow in the meantime, which happens frequently at that altitude, and Eatumup Jake wanted them to divide the difference between 287 and 292, but as one had inches and the other feet, Eatumup Jake couldn't make the proper division in his head and we had nothing to figure with. So we measured again and counted and found they each had 287. As this would only equal forty-one stock cars, and as there was forty-three cars of stock, five cars of California fruit, three cars merchandise, nine tonnage cars and the way-car, we knew our train couldn't possibly get in on this sidetrack. So Jake put on his pants and we started on again, perfectly satisfied now that we had solved what seemed at first a great mystery.

After walking several miles it became daylight and we discovered a man and woman with a mule team and wagon, going the same way we were. As they didn't seem to have much of a load and asked us to ride we concluded to ride. However, as we couldn't all ride in the wagon at once and as the wagon road wasn't always in sight of the track, we had Jackdo and the two sheepmen walk along the track, and if they found the train they were to holler and wave something to us so we would know.

Eatumup Jake had been kinder grumpy ever since he had

to stand the snowstorm without any pants on while we done the measuring, but now he was to hear some good news which brought such overwhelming joy to him as, indeed, it did to all of us, as our joys and sorrows were one on this trip. It will be remembered that Eatumup Jake had married a buxom Mormon girl about six weeks before we started with the cattle, and now it turned out that these people, who were on their way from the Two Wallys to Arkansas, had come by Jake's place in Utah and Jake's wife had not only sent a letter by this couple to him, but the letter contained the news that he was the father of twin boys. Jake's pride and joy knew no bounds, and for a time he talked about going back and taking a look at the twins and then catching up to us again. But we argued this would bring bad luck, and anyway there were immigrants on the way from Oregon to Arkansas all the time, and Jake's wife said all our folks in Utah had agreed to send us letters every time anyone came by with a team going east.

We now came in sight of our stock train as it was slowly climbing a grade, but we were loath to give up our new-found friends, the immigrants, and it wasn't till they had drove several miles ahead of the stock train that we finally bid them a reluctant good-bye and sauntered on back to meet the special. This is the first time I've used the word special, but all stock trains are known as specials because they make special time with them.

After we got on the train and had taken the prod pole, and drove the sheepmen and Jackdo out and made them ride on top, we emptied a bottle or so and Eatumup Jake got very

hilarious and sang "The Little Black Bull Came Running Down the Mountain," while we all joined in the chorus. And finally when old Chuckwagon, Packsaddle Jack and Dillbery Ike had gone to sleep on the floor of the car, Eatumup Jake got me by the button hole and told me the story of his life in the following words. He talked in a thick, slushy, slobbery voice, something like the mud and water squirts through the holes in your overshoes on a sloppy day, but this was on account of a great deal of whiskey and the fact that he had taken a slight cold the night before standing in the snowstorm while we used his pants to measure the sidetrack.

CHAPTER V.

Eatumup Jake's Life Story

He said his father was a poor Methodist preacher in a little country place in western Kansas where he was born. Said they lived there many years because they was so durn poor they couldn't get away. His father's salary was paid promptly every month in contributions and consisted of one sack of cornmeal, one sack of potatoes, two gallons sorghum molasses, four old crowing hens, seven jack rabbits, one quart choke cherry jelly and one load of dried buffalo chips for fuel. He said his father was one of the most patient beggars he ever saw, that he took up collections at all times and on all occasions, morning, noon and night – week days and Sundays he passed the hat. He had seventeen different kinds of foreign missions to beg for. He had twenty-one different kinds of home missions to beg for, and while it was the poorest community he ever saw, most people too poor to have any tea or coffee, or overshoes for winter or shoes in summer, yet his father begged so persistently that he got worlds of flannels for the heathens in Africa, any amount of bibles for the starving children in New York City and all kinds of religious literature for the reconcentrados in India.

Finally his mother died of nothing on the stomach, his father and a woman missionary went to Chicago, his nine brothers

and sisters was bound out and adopted by different people, and he, the oldest child, was taken in charge by a professional bone picker, and although he was only 10 years old at the time, yet he picked up bones on Kansas prairies summer and winter for two years till a bunch of cowpunchers came along and took him away from the bone picker. He said he never had anything much to eat till he got into this cow camp, and just eat roast veal, baking powder biscuits, plum duff and California canned goods till all the cowboys stopped eating to look at him, and one of them asked his name, and when he said Jacob, they immediately nicknamed him Eatumup Jake.

He said he never had seen any of his folks since all this happened, but one night he had a dream, just as plain as day. He thought he was in a big city and a one-legged man with blue glasses was following him, and when he stopped the man said: "Jacob, I'm your father," and he asked him how he lost his leg, what he was wearing blue glasses for (a placard saying he was blind), and why he held out a tincup, and his father said: "I aint lost any leg, it's tied up inside my pants leg, and I'm wearing glasses so people can't see my eyes." And he said his father told him that his training as a Methodist preacher had peculiarly fitted him for a professional beggar.

When Eatumup Jake finished telling his story he fell to weeping and wept very bitterly for a long time, and when I tried to comfort him by telling him a man wasn't to blame for what his folks done, he said no, but cowmen were to blame when they fell

so darn low as to spend the best part of their lives on a special stock train associating with a hobo and two sheepmen.

CHAPTER VI.

The Schoolmarm's Saddle Horse

One day while waiting on a sidetrack old Chuckwagon got to telling about the new school-marm in their neighborhood. He said he reckoned she was as high educated as anybody ever got. He said she didn't sabe cowpuncher talk much, but she used some mighty high-sounding words. Why, he said, she called a watergap a wateryawn; a shindig, a dawnce; Injuns, Naborigines; cowboys, cow servants, and Bill Allen's hired girl, where she boards, a domestic. The first night she came to Bill Allen's she heard them a talking about cowpunchers, and she asked old Bill if he wouldn't show her a real live cowpuncher: said there weren't any cowpunchers in Boston, where she came from, and old Bill said he'd have one over from the nearest cow ranch next day.

So next morning he comes over to my ranch and tells me to rig out in fur snaps, put on my buckskin shirt and big Mexican hat with tassels on it, with red silk handkerchief around my neck, and he would take me over and introduce me to the new school-marm. So I rigged all up proper, and when we got over to Bill Allen's place, old Bill told his wife to go to the school-marm's room and tell her he had a genuine cowpuncher out there and for her to come out and see him. She told Mrs. Allen she was busy just then, but tell Mr. Allen to take the cowpuncher to the barn

and give him some hay and she would be out directly.

Now, he'd been wondering ever since, old Chuck said, what on earth she reckoned a cowpuncher was. Still she was mighty green about some things, 'cause when they had a little party at old Bill Allen's all the girls got to telling about the breed of their saddle hosses, and some said their hoss was a Hamiltonian, and some said their hoss was thoroughbred, and some was Blackhawk Morgan. The school-marm said she had a gentleman friend in Boston who had a very fine saddle hoss of the stallion breed, and when the boys giggled and the gals began to look red, she says as innocent as a lamb. "There is such a breed of hosses, ain't they?" "Of course," she says, "I know it's a rare breed and perhaps you folks out here never saw any of that breed." She says, "They are great hosses to whinney. Why, my friend's hoss kept whinneying all the time." When she got to describing that hoss's habits, course all us boys begun to back up and git out the room. I reckon she was from an Irish family, 'cause she insisted Mrs. Flanagan was right when she called the station a daypo.

But I reckon she could just knock the hind sights off anybody when it came to singing. I never did know just whether it was a song or not she sung, 'cause none of us could understand it. She said it was Italian, and of course there wasn't any of us understood any Dago talk. But she would just commence away down in a kind of low growl, like a sleeping foxhound when he is dreaming of a bear fight, and keep growling a little louder and little louder, and directly begin to give some short barks, and then

it would sound like a herd of wild cattle bawling round a dead carcass; then like a lot of hungry coyotes howling of a clear frosty night, and finally wind up like hundreds of wild geese flying high and going south for winter. She said her voice had been cultivated and I reckon it had. You could tell it had been laid off in mighty even rows, the weeds all pulled out and the dirt throwed up close to the hills. But somehow I'd a heap rather hear a little blue-eyed girl I know up in the mountains in Idaho sing "The Suwanee River," and "Coming Through the Rye," 'cause I can understand that. But I guess them Boston girls are all right at home. I reckon they are used to them there.

CHAPTER VII.

Selling Cattle on the Range

Then old Packsaddle Jack got to telling about Senator Dorsey, of Star Route fame, selling a little herd of cattle he had in northern New Mexico. He said the Senator had got hold of some eyeglass Englishmen, and representing to them that he had a large herd of cattle in northern New Mexico, finally made a sale at \$25 a head all round for the cattle. The Englishmen, however, insisted on counting the herd and wouldn't take the Senator's books for them. Dorsey finally agreed to this, but said the cattle would have to be gathered first. The Senator then went to his foreman, Jack Hill, and asked Jack if he knew of a place where they could drive the cattle around a hill where they wouldn't have to travel too far getting around and have a good place to count them on one side. Jack selected a little round mountain with a canyon on one side of it, where he stationed the Englishmen and their bookkeepers and Senator Dorsey. The Senator had about 1,000 cattle, and Jack and the cowboys separated them into two bunches out in the hills, a couple of miles from the party of Englishmen and out of sight. Keeping the two herds about a mile apart, they now drove the first herd into the canyon, which ran around the edge of the bluff, and on the bank of the canyon sat the Senator with the Englishmen, and they counted the cattle as the herd

strung along by them. The herd was hardly out of sight before the second bunch came stringing along. Two or three cowboys, though, had met the first herd, and, getting behind them, galloped them around back of the mountain and had them coming down the canyon past the Englishmen again, and they were counted the second time. And they were hardly out of sight before the second division was around the mountain and coming along to be tallied some more. And thus the good work went on all day long, the Senator and the Englishmen only having a few minutes to snatch a bite to eat and tap fresh bottles.

The foreman told the English party at noon that they was holding an enormous herd back in the hills yet from which they were cutting off these small bunches of 500 and bringing them along to be tallied. But along about 3 o'clock in the afternoon the cattle began to get thirsty and footsore. Every critter had traveled thirty miles that day, and lots of them began to drop out and lay down. In one of the herds was an old yellow steer. He was bobtailed, lophorned and had a game leg, and for the fifteenth time he limped by the crowd that was counting. Milord screwed his eyeglass a little tighter into his eye, and says, "There is more bloody, blarsted, lophorned, bobtailed, yellow, crippled brutes than anything else, don't you know." Milord's dogrobber speaks up, and says, "But, me lord, there's no hanimal like 'im hin the hither 'erd."

The Senator overheard this interesting conversation, and taking the foreman aside, told him when they got that herd on

the other side of the mountain again to cut out that old yellow reprobate, and not let him come by again. So Jack cut him out and run him off aways in the mountains. But old yellow had got trained to going around that mountain, and the herd wasn't any more than tallied again till here come old Buck, as the cowboys called him, limping along behind down the canyon, the Englishmen staring at him with open mouths, and Senator Dorsey looking at old Jack Hill in a reproachful, grieved kind of way. The cowboys ran old Buck off still farther next time, but half an hour afterwards he appeared over a little rise and slowly limped by again.

The Senator now announced that there was only one herd more to count and signaled to Jack to ride around and stop the cowboys from bringing the bunches around any more, which they done. But as the party broke up and started for the ranch, old Buck came by again, looking like he was in a trance, and painfully limped down the canyon. That night the cowboys said the Senator was groaning in his sleep in a frightful way, and when one of them woke him up and asked if he was sick, he told them, while big drops of cold sweat was dropping off his face, that he'd had a terrible nightmare. He thought he was yoked up with a yellow, bobtailed, lophorned, lame steer and was being dragged by the animal through a canyon and around a mountain day after day in a hot, broiling sun, while crowds of witless Englishmen and jibbering cowboys were looking on. He insisted on saddling up and going back through the moonlight to the mountain and

see if old Buck was still there. When they arrived, after waiting awhile, they heard something coming down the canyon, and in the bright moonlight they could see old Buck painfully limping along, stopping now and then to rest.

A cowboy reported finding old Buck dead on his well-worn trail a week afterwards. But no one ever rides that way moonlight nights now, as so many cowboys have a tradition that old Buck's ghost still limps down the canyon moonlight nights.

OLD BUCK'S GHOST

Down in New Mexico, where the plains are brown and sere,
There is a ghostly story of a yellow spectral steer.
His spirit wanders always when the moon is shining bright;
One horn is lopping downwards, the other sticks upright.

On three legs he comes limping, as the fourth is sore and lame;
His left eye is quite sightless, but still this steer is game.
Many times he was bought and counted by a dude with a monocle in his eye;
The steer kept limping round a mountain to be counted by that guy.

When footsore, weary, gasping, he laid him down at last,
His good eye quit its winking; counting was a matter of the

past;

But his spirit keeps a tramping 'round that mountain trail,
And that's the cause, says Packsaddle, that I have told this
tale.

CHAPTER VIII.

True Snake Stories

Then we all got to telling true snake stories. Eatumup Jake said down on the Republican River in western Kansas the rattlesnakes were awful thick when the country was first settled. He said they had their dens in the Chalk Bluffs along the Republican and Solomon rivers; said these bluffs were full of them. It was nothing for the first settlers in that country to get together of a Sunday afternoon in the fall of the year and kill 15,000 rattlesnakes at one bluff as they lay on the shelves of rock that projected out from its face. He said the snake dens were two or three miles apart, all the way along the river for a hundred miles, and when somebody would start in to killing them at one place, why all the snakes at that den would start in to rattling. Then the snakes at the dens on each side of where they was killing them would wake up and hear their neighbors' rattle, and then they'd get mad and begin to rattle and that would wake up the snake dens beyond them and start them to rattling. And in an hour's time all the snakes for a hundred miles along that country would be rattling. When these two hundred million snakes all got to rattling at once you could hear them one hundred miles away and all the settlers in eastern Kansas would go into their cyclone cellars. But after the Populists got so thick in Kansas, if they did hear the

snakes get to rattling, they just thought five or six Populists got together and was talking politics.

Then Packsaddle Jack told about a bull-snake family he used to know in southern Kansas. He said the whole family had yellow bodies beautifully marked below the waist, but from their waist up, including their necks and heads, was a shiny coal black. The old man bull-snake would beller just like a bull when he was stirred up. The old lady bull-snake had sort of an alto voice and the younger master and misses bull-snakes went from soprano and tenor down to a hiss. He said this family of bull-snakes were very proud of their clothes, as there weren't any other bull-snakes dressed like them, all the other bull-snakes being just a plain yellow. And old Mrs. Bull-snake used to talk about her ancestors on her father's side, and she called the scrubby willow under which they had their den the family tree, and talked about the family tree half her time. She never allowed her daughters to associate with any of the common young bull-snakes, but kept them coiled up around home under the family tree till they got very delicate, being in the shade all the time. All the snakes in the country looked up to this family of half-black bull-snakes and they were known by the name of Half-Blacks. All the old female bull-snakes in the country around there, if they had just a distant speaking acquaintance with Mrs. Half-Black, always spoke of her as "my dear intimate friend Mrs. Half-Black." Old Papa Half-Black set around all swelled up with unwary toads he'd swallowed when they came under the family tree for shade,

and while he didn't say much about his ancestry and family tree, yet he was mighty proud and dignified. Sometimes he would slip off from his illustrious family, and going over the hill where there was a little sand blow-out and something to drink, he'd meet some of the Miss Common Bull-snakes, and then he would unbend a good deal from his dignity and treat them with great familiarity, and after having a few drinks call them his sweethearts and get them to sing "The Good Old Summer Time," and he would join in the chorus with his heavy bass voice, and they would all be very gay. Of course, he never told old Mrs. Half-Black about these meetings, cause she wouldn't understand them.

But with all their glory this aristocratic family of half-black bull-snakes came to an untimely end. One day there came along a couple of mangy Kansas hogs and rooted the whole family out and eat them up as fast as they came to them; rooted up the family tree also.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.