



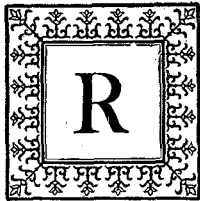
He'd camp on the critters' tails till they'd use all the energy they had to get out of the way.—Page 186.

Cattle Rustlers

BY WILL JAMES

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY THE AUTHOR

Will James says of his cowboy articles and drawings: "Yessir, as the cowboy speaks, by all means, is the way I intended the article to be published. Good English is fine, but it don't git there. I've records to show that I've lived the life further and deeper than very few cowboys have. I've worked at it for a living and it's all I know. I'm proud to say that I'm a cowpuncher, and not of the 1923 variety. I'm known as the cowboy artist without my saying so—it's taken for granted, for how can one know without really having the experience?"



RAGGED, bewhiskered, narrow-brained, cruel, and mighty dangerous to all folks, specially women, unscrupulous, with a hankering to kill and destroy all what he runs across, leaving nothing behind but the smoke, and a grease spot, is the impression folks get thru the movies and other fiction of the cattle rustler and horse-thief.

I don't blame them folks for shivering at the thought of ever meeting such a bad hombre, but they can rest easy, 'cause there is no such animal in the cattle rustler. Picture for yourself a man sleeping out under the stars, watching the sunrise and sunsets, where there's no skyscrapers or smoke to keep him from seeing *it all* acting that way or being what *they* say he is.

When I speak of cattle rustlers, I don't mean them petty cheap crooks what's

read dime novels and tries to get tough, steals some poor old widow's last few "dogies" 'cause they ain't got guts enough to get theirs from the big outfits what keeps riders the year 'round—they kind don't last long enough to be mentioned anyhow—and I always figgered the rope what kept 'em from touching the earth was worth a heap more than what it was holding.

There's cases where some cowboy what's kind of reckless and sorta free with his rope, might get a heap worse reputation than what he deserves; and he gradually gets the blame for any stock disappearing within a couple of hundred miles from his stomping ground. Naturally that gets pretty deep under his hide, with the result that he might live up to his reputation, he figgers he just as well, 'cause if he gets caught "going south" with five hundred head he won't get hung any higher than he would for running off with just some old "ring boned" saddle horse.

Consequences is when the stock associations and others start to keep him on the move, he's using his *long rope* for fair, and when he's moving there's a few carloads of prime stock making tracks ahead of him. In Wyoming a few of the feud men tried to even scores that way; the hill billy was on horseback and toting a hair-trigger carbine.

I don't want to give the impression that the cattlemen started in the cow business by rustling, not by a long shot—they're plumb against it in all ways, and most of 'em would let their herd dwindle down to none rather than brand anything lessen they're shure it's their own. But there is some what naturally hates to see anything go unbranded wether it's theirs or not, and being the critter don't look just right to 'em without said iron, they're most apt to plant one on and sometimes the brand don't always fit.

Like for instance, there was Bob Ryan riding mean horses all day and a lot of the night in all kinds of weather for somebody else at thirty a month and bacon. It wasn't any too interesting to him; he kinda hankered for a little range and a few head of stock of his own, and come to figgering that some outfits he'd rode for had no objections to their riders picking up a "slick" whenever it was safe. There was no reason much why them slicks couldn't just as well bear his own "iron," and that certain "ranny" being overambitious that way and sorta care-free, buys a few head of cows, calves, and yearlings, wherever he can get 'em and takes a "squatter" in the foothills, his weaning corrals being well hid higher up in some heavy timbered box canyon, and proceeds to drag a loop that makes him ashamed, at first.

There's the start of your cattle rustler—it's up to how wise he is, or how lucky, wether he keeps it up till he's really one or not. If he can get by till his herd is

the size he wants it without getting caught, most likely he'll stop there and no one will know the difference, but if some inquisitive rider gets wind of his doings, and that wind scatters till it begins



The stage-driver takes him and his "thirty years' gathering" to the railroad-station.—Page 184.

to look like a tornado, why it's liable to leave him in bad humor and make him somewhat more reckless.

A few months after Bob started on his own, a couple of riders out on circle was bringing in a bunch to the "cutting grounds," and in the "drags" noticed four cows with big bags bellering their heads off—and no calves. In another drive there's two more. Next morning, the range boss takes two riders with him, leaving the straw boss take the others out on first "circle"—the six cows with the full bags was turned loose the night before and the boss finds 'em by a little corral in the brush still bellering (a cow and calf, if separated and losing track of one another, always return to where they'd last been together and wait for days till the one missing returns), there'd been a lot of cattle there and most impossible to track any special critter, so he goes up on a ridge towards the high mountains and "cuts" for tracks. A few miles to the north he runs across what he's looking for, and by the signs to be seen they shure must of been travelling and a horse track was there on top of the rest, looked a few days old.

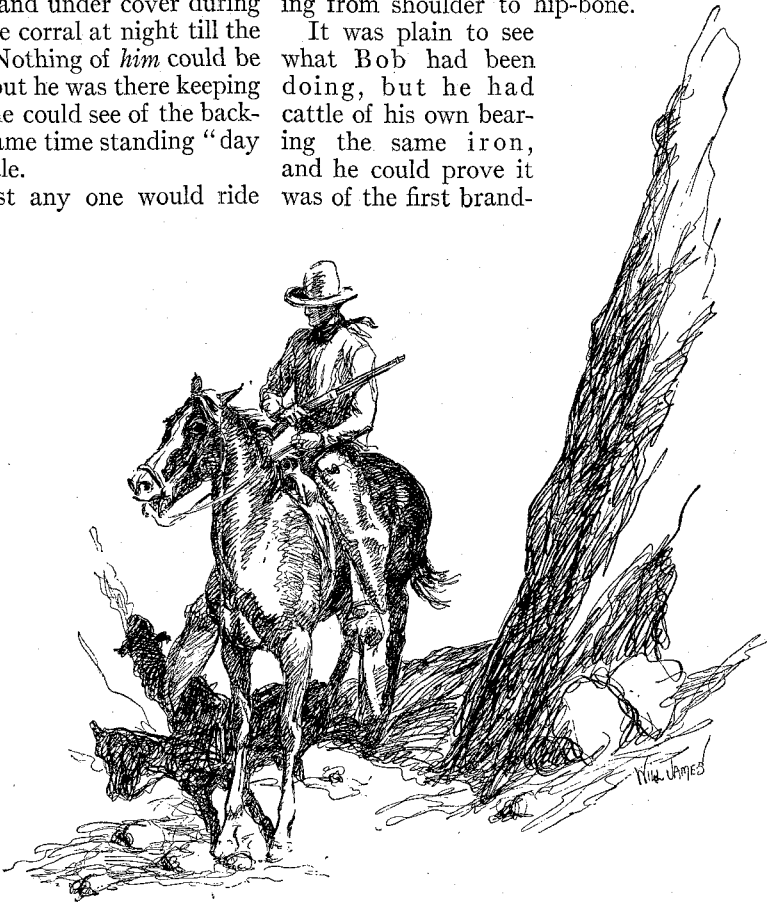
Up a canyon it leads a ten or twelve miles and they pass by Bob's camp, not seeing it. It was well hid and what's more, tracks is what the boss and the two riders was keeping their eyes on most—up a little further there's a corral and if it wasn't for them tracks it'd never be found. There'd been cattle there the night before it was plain to see. They kept quiet and listened, off into the timber higher up a calf was heard and single file they climbed toward where it sounded to be from, when figgering they was close enough, they scattered and went three ways and on past around where the cattle was feeding till they got up above 'em, then joined one another; and getting off their horses they climbed a high point, squatted, took their hats off, and looking thru the cracks of a red rock, they could see a few of the cattle below 'em. Bob had 'em on feed and under cover during the day and in the corral at night till the brands healed. Nothing of *him* could be seen anywheres, but he was there keeping his eye on what he could see of the back-trail and at the same time standing "day herd" on the cattle.

Bob knew most any one would ride right up into the cattle, if in case they was looking for him figgerin' he'd be there, but he would of fooled 'em by just dropping off his perch into the other canyon and making distance—by the time they'd got thru looking for him he'd been in the next county. The boss reckoned on all that, being quite a hand on them sorta tricks himself at one time; so calculates the best thing to do is keep out of sight, circle around back to the corral, hide and wait till Bob brought

the cattle down and put up the poles at the gate. Along about sundown, the cattle is coming and Bob is with 'em, drives 'em into the corral, and he's putting up the last pole when from three different places at close distance he hears the command "Put up your hands," "Way up there!" Bob reaches for the sky, knowing better than try to do different.

The next morning to the boss's surprise, there's no weaners in that corral; all grown stock mostly cows, and calves too young to be branded, but them cows had fresh irons and earmarks on 'em just beginning to heal. What was the original iron on them critters nobody could make out, it was blotched so bad and the ears cut so short that there was nothing to be seen but the *new iron*, that being shure visible and stretching from shoulder to hip-bone.

It was plain to see what Bob had been doing, but he had cattle of his own bearing the same iron, and he could prove it was of the first brand-



The hill billy was on horseback and toting a hair-trigger carbine.—Page 182.

ing, and them weaners disappearing was a puzzle. The boss had a strong hunch he had 'em hid somewheres, but where? and how could he prove Bob did it?

Bob not being caught red-handed just lands into court, and with his lawyer wins the fight; the judge and jury pronounces him "Not Guilty" and the lawyer takes the cattle for the fee. (It's most impossible to convict any one of cattle rustling, and that's why "necktie-parties" was so popular.) When the sun shines on his freedom again, the first thing that stares him in the eye is cattle once more, cattle everywhere on the hillsides and brakes—he knows it's his move, so calculates to make the most of it while moving. His idea is to clear enough to get him started in some new country, where he ain't branded so well.

He knows he'll get the blame for all that disappears in that territory, so he goes to work and takes pains to let everybody know in the town and country that he's hitting the breeze. He wants to let 'em understand that there'll be a whole State, maybe two, between him and those what suspicions. He sticks around for a week or more, straightening out his affairs, and the while telling the folks about him what a paradise this new country is where he's going to, that he wouldn't come back again on a bet.

The stage-driver takes him and his "thirty years' gathering" to the railroad-station and comes back telling the store-keeper and livery-stable man that he's went for sure. He'd seen him buy a ticket for some town a thousand miles away, and everybody kinda draws a long breath saying something like "good ridance of bad rubbish."

Sure enough, Bob had went alright, and arrives at this new country unknown and walking kinda straight. The sheriff ain't ever heard of him and he inquires 'round at the stable where the headquarters for the Blue River Land and Cattle Company might be found. The Superintendent, upon his asking for a job, informs him that he's full-handed excepting that he could use a good man "snapping broncs."

A few days later you could see Bob inside the breaking corral of the home ranch; four broncs are tied up and getting "eddicated" and another's saddled

ready to be "topped off." He's standing there rolling a smoke, his mind not at all on the hobbled glass-eyed horse standing alongside him with legs wide apart and tipping the saddle near straight up with the hump that makes the boys ride. His eyes are on over and past the other broncs tied to the corral, and sees only away across the valley some fifteen miles. Timber out there draws his attention, and Bob wonders what the range is like at the perticular spot.

It's quite a ride for a green bronc, but not many days later you could see him winding up, following the cow trails to that timber and waterhole. He passes two "alkali licks" and rides on thru the aspens to the mesa—white sage, grama, and mountain bunch-grass everywhere, shad-scale on the flat and wild peas in the gullies higher up. There's a line of troughs at the water hole and a few head of the Blue River cattle are watering there.

That night at the bunk house with the boys, Bob hazes the talk to drifting on about the springs and holdings of the company and by just listening, asking no questions, he finds that the little range he'd rode into that day was held by the outfit. He had a hunch they was holding it with no rights, and every one in the country had took it for granted it was theirs, never bothering about finding out.

A few months later the broncs are all "snapped out," a pay check in Bob's chap pocket, and then pretty soon a log house is up and the smoke coming out of the fireplace thru the timber where the line of troughs and alkali licks was located. There was a howl from the company about somebody "jumping" one of their springs, but that don't do no good, saying they owned that range and proving it was two different things; and Bob stayed on, taking in horses to break at ten dollars a head and making a big bluff as to how much he's putting away, every so often.

One day Bob disappears and is gone for most six weeks; his place being out of the way of any riders nobody knows he'd went or returned, and if you'd asked him where he was keeping himself he'd said, "home." Anyway, in a few days after his return, he buys a hundred head of mixed stock, and some kinda wondered where he'd got the money to buy stock with, figgering even if he did make a good stake at break-



He's rolling a smoke, his mind not at all on the hobbled glass-eyed horse standing alongside him.—Page 184.

ing horses, it wouldn't buy one-fourth the cattle he'd paid cash for. He disappears once more without any one knowing of it and buys another little bunch of "dogies." Bob was getting bolder every time and the big outfits a thousand miles to the north and east was putting out a big reward for a cattle thief they didn't have the description of. They'd plumb forgot about Bob, knowing him to be south somewhere and doing well, as they'd hear tell from the riders travelling thru.

He got so he could change a brand on a critter, and with a broken blade and a little acid of his own preparation make that brand to suit his taste, and in fifteen minutes appear like it'd been there since the critter was born. You could feel the scaly ridge in the hide where the iron was supposed to've been and even a little white hair here and there; it would shure stand inspection from either the eye or the hand.

Bob knowing every hill, coulee, flat, creek, and river of that country, was a

great help to him. He'd rode every foot of it for a hundred miles around. It was where he'd stood trail and lost his first herd. He knew the folks there had forgot him and that's what he wanted. It left him a clear trail out of suspicion; the train would take and leave him at some neighboring town at night getting a couple of ponies and hitting out on "jerky," a little flour and salt before sun-up, he'd skirt the foothills and never would a rider get sight of him. Laying low by day and riding by night he'd locate the herds with the best beef and camp within a few miles of 'em so if they drifted he'd know their whereabouts, and soon as the weather permit, fog on behind 'em.

At the first sign of a strong wind, when tracks a few hours old are sifted over with fine sand, or before a first snow, you could see Bob getting his "piggin' string," unlimbering his ropes and testing his acid; his copper "running iron" was always with him too, hid between his saddle skirting and the lining; his 30-30 well cleaned and oiled and the old smoke wagon under his shirt and resting on his chap belt, he'd hit out on the best horse the country had for the herd he'd been watching, and go to cutting out a couple of carloads of the prime stuff he could get. Of course, by the time he'd get 'em to the shipping point, or market, they'd only be "feeders," but that brought a fair price.

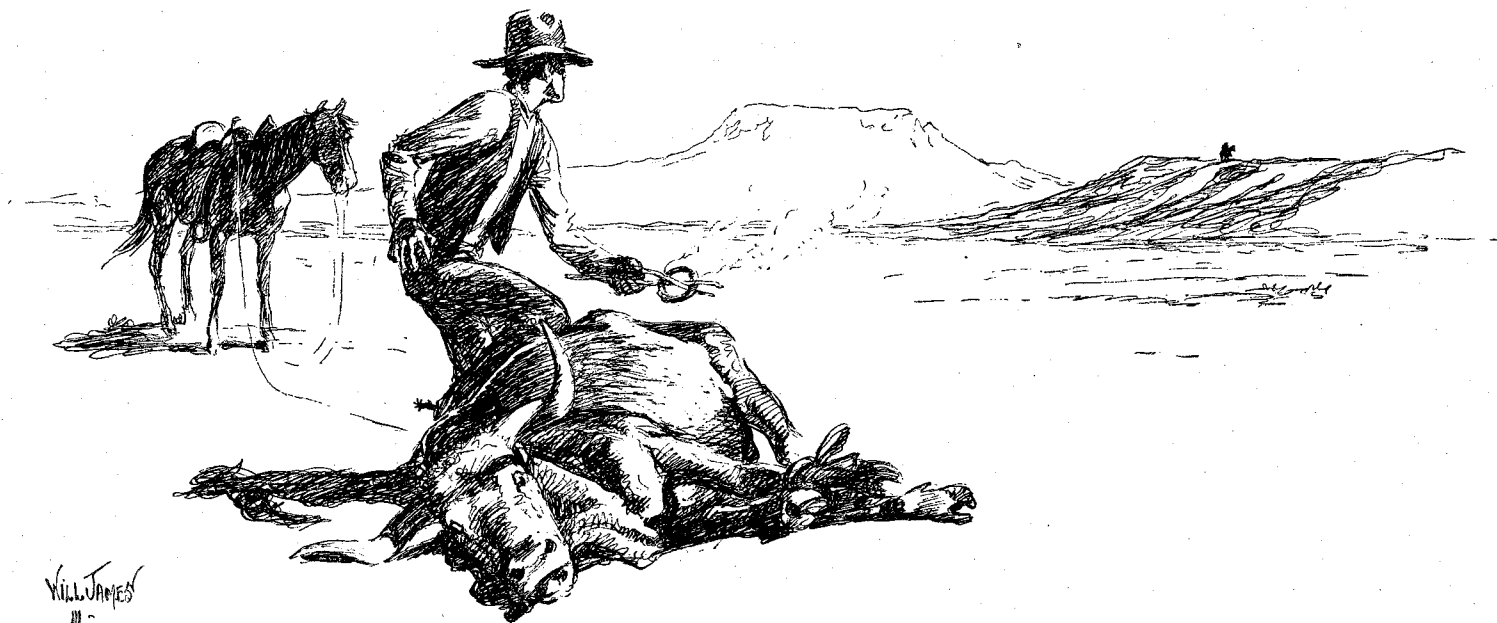
The first night he'd camp on the critters' tails till they'd use all the energy they had to get out of the way. (In some cases it's been known of some cattle rustlers covering over forty miles single-handed with fifty some odd head in one night.) Bob had figgered a long time ahead the best way to take his cattle out, the hiding places for the day and water to go with it, keeping shy of fences and ranches. At first sign of the rising sun his cattle was watered and taken up in some timbered canyon, the brands was worked over and a few hours later the herd was bedded down or feeding. The next night would be easier on both man and stock, and by the third, Bob felt pretty secure, but never would you find him with the cattle during the day. The cattle being too tired to stray away was left soon as watered and taken on feed. When they'd be hid, Bob would "back-

trail" a mile or so, where he could watch his cattle and see any riders what might be following him. In case there was, he had plenty of time before they got to his cattle and had 'em identified to make a get away; for even tho' an "iron" may be worked over into another, the rustler ain't going to take a chance. There may be a "marker" in that bunch that only the owner, or the riders familiar with the cattle, would recognize; and that's enough to entitle the rustler to the stout limb and a piece of rope if he's caught.

It was getting real interesting, and he did not realize that he was taking a liking to stealing cattle and making clean get-aways. The herd at his home camp was getting to be just a bluff, bearing half a dozen different recorded irons and earmarks. He was beginning to use them to fall back on in case investigation was made and traced back to his "hang out." He'd made three trips to Chicago and was just thinking of settling down to steal no more. He knew this good luck wouldn't last, and besides, picking up a few "ore-janas" now and again around his own little range to the south might prove just as interesting; but the fever had him, with the result that he found out no matter how close you figger there's always something you'll overlook what'll give you away.

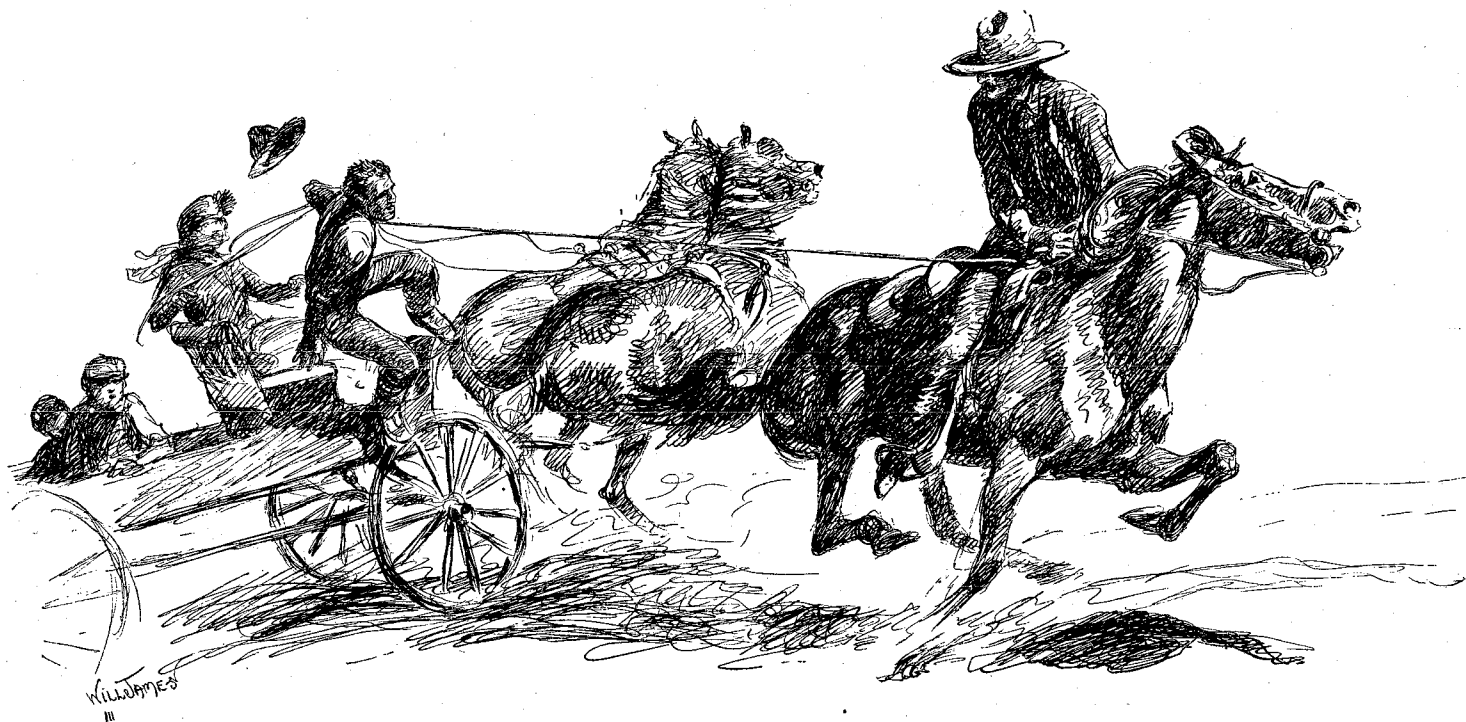
He started north for another raid, and thought he'd take his own saddle horses along this time, being that good horses are hard to pick up everywhere that way. There was one horse especially he hated to leave behind. It was a big blood bay, bald-faced and stocking-legged, and when he got to his destination to the north, and the stock car was being switched at the yards, one of the old timers recognized the horse and kept mum till Bob came to the stock car and led him out with his other horse. Ten minutes later Bob was feeding up at the "open-all-night" chink restaurant and watching the front door. The sheriff comes thru the kitchen and when Bob turned around to his "ham and eggs" there was the muzzle of a "45" staring him in the eye.

He lost his second herd to the same lawyer and faced the same judge of two years before. He'd only stole one horse where he'd got away with over two hundred head of cattle in that country, but that one horse put the kibosh on him.



From a drawing by Will James.

A man with a critter down, his horse standing rope's length away, is a good thing to keep away from—unless you want to get your Stetson perforated.—Page 189.



From a drawing by Will James.

A little "wild cat" loop settles neat and around that waster's neck, he's jerked off his seat and drug to the nearest cottonwood.—Page 189.

There was no proof that he'd stole any cattle, but they suspicioned mighty strong; and they couldn't of handed him any more if they could of proved it. So figgering on killing two birds with one stone, the judge, not weeping any, throws the book at him, which means he gives Bob the limit.

If Bob would of had better luck the first time he tried to settle down in the country, where he'd made such a bad "reputation" for himself, most likely by now he'd been just a prosperous cowman and kept his "long ropes" to home. I don't figger Bob was bad, just a little too anxious to have something, and later on getting too much satisfaction in outwitting others. Any stranger was welcome to Bob's camp to feed and rest up; a fresh horse, or anything else he had, was offered to them what needed it, and it wouldn't matter if your pack horse was loaded with gold nuggets they was just as safe in his bunk house, or maybe safer, then in the safety vault. His specialty was cattle and he got to love to use his skill in changing irons.

He was just like a big average of the Western outlaw and cattle rustler; his squareness in some things made up for his crookedness in others. There was no petty work done; saddle, spurs and chaps was safe hanging over the corral but there was one thing you had to keep away from in the rustler's doings; if you saw at a distance a smoke going up, one man with a critter down and a horse standing rope's length away, it's always a good idea to ride way around and keep out of sight, unless you wanted your Stetson perforated. If you was interested and had company, why that's another story.

I used to know a big cowman, who'd been fairly free with the running iron at one time and had done a heap of rustling. Many a head he'd lost in the same way afterwards. Those he caught was dealt mighty hard with, and he'd expected the same if he'd ever made that fatal mistake, but he was lucky enough not to.

One day a "nester," what had drifted in from the other side of the plains and settled on one of his creek bottoms, finds himself and family run out of bacon or any sort of meat. He ups and shoots a fine yearling, takes the hindquarters and leaves the rest in the hide for the coyotes,

or to spoil. One of the riders runs onto the carcass, and lucky there was no proof of who done it, for that kind of doings sure gets a "rise" from a cowhand. A little over a month later, another yearling is butchered the same way, but the hide is gone and that's what makes it interesting.

It was found under the nester's little haystack. There's nobody home just then. The cowman finding this evidence had changed many an iron and earmark in his early start (as I've mentioned before) but never had he played hog and left any perfectly good beef to spoil on the range, and he figgers to teach that country spoiling hombre a few lessons in range etiquette. About sundown, he catches up with him and family just when the wagon and team reaches the mussel-shell bottoms where there's fine big cottonwoods. A carbine stares the nester in the face, and at the same time the cowman produces a piece of the hide bearing his iron and asks him to account for it. The man on the wagon is too scared to speak or move, so is the rest back of the seat.

The cowman uncoils his rope, plays with it a while, and pretty soon a little "wild cat" loop settles neat and around that waster's neck, he's drug off his seat and close to one of them natural gallows, the rope is throwed over a limb, picked up again on the other side, and taking his "dallies" to the saddle horn, the cowman goes on till that farmer's big feet are just about a yard off the ground, a squawk is heard from the wagon and the whole family runs up to plead for the guilty party. They plead on for quite a spell but the cowman acts determined and hard of hearing. When it's gone far enough and that nester gets blue 'round the gills, the rope slacks up and he sprawls down to earth; the cowman is right atop of him and tells him he's got his family to thank for to see the sun come up again, "and if I ever catch you leaving meat of my stock to spoil on the range again I'll get you up so far you'll never come down, family or no family"; and he winds up with "*you can kill all of my beef you need*, but just what you need and no more, do you hear? And I want you to produce the hides of them beeves too, every one of 'em."

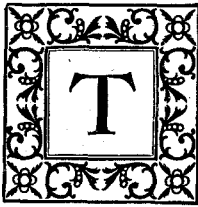
With that he rides off, and the nester's family is still trying to figger out what kind of folks are these "cow persons," anyway.

Stumbling Feet

BY STRUTHERS BURT

Author of "John O'May and Other Stories," etc.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLES BASKERVILLE, JR.



TAYLOR had come down from Switzerland a day or so ahead of his friend Gardiner, and the second night of his stay, wandering about the cafés in his placid interested fashion, he had run across his old acquaintance Mrs. Russell and through her had been introduced to Lady Newbold. . . . Anne, Mrs. Russell called her . . . the youthful wife of the very great man whom he had been watching from a distance for the past five weeks. Taylor, to begin with, was delighted . . . he had not had the slightest idea that the Newbolds were also to be in the south of France; and, for a few minutes following the introduction, he had been disappointed. However, he was used to being disappointed when he met the families of important people. The important people themselves were usually too busy to be anything but simply, if somewhat absent-mindedly, cordial, but the vicariously important . . . the wives and sisters and mothers and brothers of the important!

A trifle impatiently he asked this particular vicariously important one to dance, and it was then that he made his first discovery; she danced marvellously, light as thistle-down; you were merely conscious that there was something warm and slim and fragrant in your arms that followed each movement you made with an intuition that was genius.

Feeling a renewal of interest in a personality that expressed itself so differently from what he had expected, Taylor looked down and reassured himself of a physical perfection that originally had only added to his disappointment; a redness of lips, a hawthorn color of cheeks, a bronze of hair. Her eyes, gentian-blue eyes, under half-lowered bronze lashes, had lost their in-

difference, their . . . what was it? their look of sullenness, their childish defiance, their ultra-modern indifference, that had so annoyed him, and were absorbed and contented. Nor did he think he was giving way too much to an inclination to judge character too hastily when he imagined that he was aware as well of a force compact and passionate directed by something honest and quick-seeing. A force ordinarily concealed, but released in the unconsciousness of rhythm. She had a very tender, mobile mouth, wiser and sweeter than her years. Taylor stared at it.

The shuffling of the drums and the broken exultation of the violins and saxophones came to an end, and the kaleidoscope of the dancers fell apart, separating itself into its double pieces of vividly dressed women and sombrely dressed men. The vivid half pieces applauded with a languid rapture, the sombre half pieces with good-natured acquiescence.

Taylor's companion struck her hands together a couple of times and then let them drop to her sides. "I'd like another dance," she said, "but I think we ought to be getting back. It's late. Mrs. Russell will be wanting to go to her hotel." She smiled, entirely frank and friendly and amused. "I've found out one thing," she added; "you're very dependable, aren't you? Dancing is very revealing. I'm afraid I was in rather a bad humor, but you've cheered me up. It's encouraging to meet dependable people. Perhaps you're too dependable, though, for your own happiness."

Taylor smiled back at her and followed her across the shining gray-panelled room with its flanking tables, beginning to receive again their occupants, and so, through one of the many-paned glass doors, to the terrace from which they had come. Beyond the stone balustrade of