



OSCAR CHARLIE
BY HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS
PER CHARLEY

"BOOOOOORRRRR!" moaned the foghorn. This was very dreadful. But worse followed. The waters gathered themselves and rose into a peak, the mule sliding swiftly to the apex, still holding me with his uncanny eyes. There came a shock and Oscar said:

"For the Lord's sake, kid! They've been braying away on that breakfast horn for the last five minutes. Hustle!" I found myself upon my hands and knees; in a cabin, all right, but the cabin was on the prairie. I looked around, stupid with sleep. The familiar sights met my eye—Oscar uptoeing about, bow-legged, arms spread like wings, drawing his breath through his teeth, after the fashion of half-frozen people. Old Charley sat humped up in the corner, sucking his cob pipe. The stove was giving forth a smell of hot iron and not heat, as usual. On it rested a washbasin, wherein some snow was melting for the morning ablutions. A candle projected a sort of palpable yellow gloom into the gray mass of icy morning air.

I dressed rapidly. As I slept in overcoat and cap, this was no great matter. A pair of German socks and arctics completed my attire. Evidently I had been put upon the floor by the hand of Oscar. For this, when Oscar stretched his nether garment tight, in the act of washing his face, I smote him upon the fullness thereof with a long plug of chewing tobacco. "Aow!" he yelled, recurring like a bow and putting his hands to his wound. Promptly we clinched and fell upon old Charley. To the floor the three went, amid a shower of sparks from the cob pipe.

"You dam pesky kids!" said the angry voice of Charley (the timbre of that voice, after traveling through four inches of nose, is beyond imitation). "Get off'n me! Quit now! Stop yer blame foolin'!"

Oscar and I swallowed our giggles and rolled all over Charley.

"Well, by Jeerops!" came from the bottom of the heap in the tone of one who has reached the breaking point of astonished fury. "I'm goin' to do some shootin' when this is over—yes, sir, I won't hold back no more—ef you boys don't git off'n me this mornin', so help me Bob! I'll bite yer!"

This was a real danger, and we skipped him off briskly.

"Why, Charley," explained Oscar, "you see, we got so excited that we didn't notice—"

"There's Steve now," interrupted Charley, pointing with a long, crooked forefinger to the doorway. "Well, Steve, I'm glad you come. I just want you to see the kind of goin's on there is here."

Charley cleared his throat and stuck his thumb in his vest.

"Fr instance, this mornin', I aittin' right there in that corner, not troublin' nobody, when up gets that spray-footed, sprawlin', lumberin' bull-calf of an Oscar, an' that mischievous, sawed-off little monkey of a Harry, and they goes to pullin' and tusslin', and they jes' walks up and down on me, same's if I was a flight of steps.

color, as the words went to his head like wine.

Steve looked at the floor. "Too bad, Charley; too bad," he said in grave sympathy. "But probably we can fix it up. Now, as we have company, would you mind hitting the breakfast trail?"

"After I've made a few remarks," returned Charley haughtily.

Steve dropped on a stool. "Slick your pup on," he said. Charley leaped at the opportunity.

"There are some things I sh'd like to mention," said he. We noted with pleasure that he wore his sarcastic manner. "Fr instance, you doubtless behold them small piles of snow on the floor, which has come in through certain an' sundry holes in the wall that orter been chinked last fall. Is it my place to chink them holes? The oides' an' most experienced man in the hull catherp? I reckon otherwise. Then why didn't they get it chinked?"

"Why is it that the snows and winds of an outraged and justly indignant Providence is allowed to introduce themselves into this company unrebuked? I have heard a great deal, su', about the deadenin' effect produced upon man's vigor by a steady, reliable, so'thern climate. As a citizen of the State of Texas fo' twenty years I reple the experian with scorn and hoomiliation. Neverthe-less and no-withstandin', 'lowin' that to be the truth, did you ever encounter anything in this here country to produce such an effect?"

"For Gawd's sake, su', if there's anything in variety, a man livin' here orter lay hold of the grass roots, fur here he'd git so durn strong he couldn't stay on the face of the yearth. Ef it ain't so sinful cold that yer ears'll drap off at a touch, it's so hell-fire hot that a man's features melt all over his face; and ef it ain't so solemn still that you're scart to death, the wind'll blow the button-holes out yer clo's. I have seen it do a hull yearful of stunts in twenty-four hours, encludin' hot an' cold weather, thunderstorms, drought, high water and a blizzard. That settles the climate question.

"Then what is it that has let them holes go unchinked? I'll tell you, su'; it's nothin' more nor less than the tinkerin', triflin', pettifoggin' dispersion of them two boys. That's what makes it that there's no' outdoors inside this bull-pen than there is on the top of Chunkey Smith's butte; that's what makes it I can't get up in the mornin' without havin' myself turned into a three-ringed circus. But I ain't the man to complain. Ef there's anything that gams up the cards of life, it's a kicker; so jes' as one man to another, I tells you what's wrong here and leaves you to figger it out fer yerself."

He glanced around on three grave faces with obvious satisfaction. His wrath had dissipated in the vapor of his words. "Nor they ain't such bad boys, as boys, nuther," he concluded.

"I will examine this matter carefully, Charley," said Steve.

"I thank you, su'," responded Charley with a courtly sweep of his hand.

"Certainly!" And out we went into North Dakota's congealed envelope, with the smoke from the main house chimney rising 200 feet into the air a snow-white column, straight as a mast; Charley stalking majestically ahead, while we three floundered weakly behind him.

"Ain't he the corker?" gasped Oscar. "When he gets to jumpin' sideways among those four-legged woies he separates me from my good intentions."

"With scorn and hoomiliation," quoted Steve, and stopped, overcome.

"I tells you what's the matter and leaves you to figger it out for yourself," I added. Then Charley heard us. He turned and approached, an awful frown upon his brow.

"May I inquire what is the reason of this yer merriment?" he asked. The manner was that of a man who proposed to find out. It sat on Charley with so ludicrous a parody that we were further undone. Steve raised his hands in deprecation, and spoke in a muffled voice that broke at intervals.

"Can't I laugh in my own back yard, Charley?" he said. "By the Lord Harry, I will laugh inside my stakes! No man shall prevent me. The Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence and the Continental Congress give me the right. Now what have you got to say?"

"I dunno but what you have me whipsawed there, Steve," replied Charley, scratching his head. "Ef it's your right by the Constitution, o' course I ain't goin' to object."

"Do either of you object?" demanded Steve of Oscar and me in his deepest

base. No, we didn't object; we fell down in the snow and crowed like chanticleer.

"Hunh!" snorted Charley. "Hunh! Them boys hain't got brains in their heads at all—nothin' but doo-dle-bugs!"

"Well, Charley," continued Steve, "as you don't object and they don't object and I don't object, for God's sake let's have breakfast!"

"I'll go you, Steve," replied Charley seriously and we entered the house uproariously.

There in the kitchen was Mrs. Steve and the "company," a pretty little bright-eyed thing, whose color went and came at a word—more particularly if Oscar said the word. The affair was at present in the formal state—the dawn of realization that two such wonderful and magnificent creatures as Oscar and Sally existed.

But they were not Oscar and Sally except in the dear privacy of their souls. Yet how much that is not obvious to the careless ear can be put into "Will you have a buckwheat cake, Mr. Kendall?" or "May I give you a helping of the syrup, Miss Brown?" It took some preparation for each to get

evidence against one another, promotes a warfare of words, incites playing for high stakes and running unexampled risks until sooner or later comes the collapse, the public odium and rage, the personal downfall and the sense of shame and degradation which must go with it, no matter how brazen the attempt to hide them from view.

There is profound suggestiveness in a recent remark of President Tucker of Dartmouth College: "The time is come when a man of many desires

Ourselves and Money

must train himself to live for money or train himself to live without a sufficiency of it." We have yet to attain in this country a generally prevalent restraint in this direction. In every great city are hundreds of persons living just beyond their income, simply because they have not trained themselves to do without certain material comforts. The great majority of us must be contented with modest incomes. Ministers, teachers and public officials on salaries, clerks and artisans, heads of departments and manual laborers alike soon reach a point

out so simple a remark and invariably the one addressed started guiltily and got crimson. It was the most uncomfortable rapture I ever saw.

However, they received very little plugging. I can remember but one hard hit. Oscar was pouring syrup upon Sally's cakes, his eyes fixed upon a dainty hand that shook under his gaze like a leaf. He forgot his business. Steve looked at the inverted, empty syrup cup for some moments in silence. Then he said to his wife: "Empty, go and get Sally a nice cupful of fresh air to put on her cakes; that Oscar has in the pitcher is stale by this time."

Oh, those cakes! And the ham! And the fried eggs and potatoes! We lived like fighting cocks at Steve's, as happens on most of the small ranches. The extreme glory of the prairie was not ours. We were wood choppers, hay cutters, and farmers, as well as punchers; but what we lost in romance, we made up in sustenance. No one ever saw a biscuit suffering from soda-jaundice on Steve's table. And how, after a night's sleep in a temperature of 40 below zero, I would champ my teeth on the path to breakfast! Eating was not an appetite in those days—it was a passion.

Charley and I went forth after breakfast, Oscar lingering a moment, according to his use, to pass a painful five minutes in making excuses for staying that time, where no one needed any explanation.

"I wish to gracious Sally and Oscar would just act like people," said Mrs. Steve once in exasperation. "They get me so nervous stammering at

Charley had an ill-advised notion to play the paternal.

"Now, I'd cool down if I was you, Steve," he admonished.

"You would, would you?" foamed Steve. "Well, who the devil cares what you'd do, anyhow? And if you tell me to cool down just 'cause more I'll drive you into the ground like a tent-pin."

I jumped through the window, and then laughed, while Charley administered his reproof with appropriate gestures. His long arms flew in the air as he delivered the inspired address, Steve looking at him, a bit of shamefacedness and fun showing through his heat.

"An' mo' I tell you, Steven P. Hendricks!" rolled out Charley in conclusion. "That citizen of Texas, jusly and rightusly called the Lone Star State, has never yet experienced the feeling of bein' daunted by face of man, nor hoof of jackass. No, su'! By God, su'!" He held the shovel aloft like a sword. "Let 'em come as they will, male and female after their kind, from a ninety poun' Jew peddler to Mangus Colorado, and from a pise-on-toed Digger Injun, squaw to a fo'-hundred-weight Dutch lady, I turn my back on none!"

"You win, Charley," said Steve, and walked off. All Oscar caught out of it was the request that when he felt like reducing the stock on the ranch he'd take a rifle.

Poor Oscar! All noble and heroic sentiments struggling within him, with no outlet but a hesitating advancing of the theory that "if we didn't get rain before long the country'd be awful dry." Small wonder that he burst out

dull gray blink upon the western skyline seemed to promise a blizzard. We were tying down the last load, when I heard the hum of wind coming, and looked up, expecting to see a wall of flying snow, and continued looking, seeing nothing of the kind. There I stood, in the air of an icehouse, when a gust of that wind struck me in the face. A miracle! In a snap of your fingers I was bathed in genial warmth. All about me rode the scent of spring and flowers! It was as if the doors of a giant conservatory were thrown open.

"Chinook, boys! Chinook!" I called, casting down my fork. They ran from the lee of the stack, throwing their coats open, drinking it in and laughing, for, man, we were weary of winter! First it came in puffs, at length settling down to a steady breeze as of the sea. The sun that in the early morning was no more than a pale effigy poured on us a heart-warming fire. We hustled for home, knowing that the Chinook would make short work of the snow; in fact, we had not covered more than half the distance before the prairie began to show brown here and there, where it lay thin between mountain drifts. We sang and howled all the way to the sheds, feeling fine.

Here Steve left us to go to the house, while Oscar and I unloaded the sleighs.

Suddenly I felt uncomfortable, for no reason in this world. The land about us was rejoicing with booming of that kind, warm wind, yet a sharp uneasiness seized me and forced me to raise my head. For three-quarters of a circle nothing met my eye but the vanishing snow drifts. I reached the house; nothing wrong there. Steve was walking briskly out toward us, smoking his pipe. Then the corral—all right, number one, two, three, four—Lord have mercy!

"Oscar!" I shrieked, and snatched him to his feet. He rose, bewildered and half angry, then looked to where I pointed.

Through the center of number four corral tripped Sally, dear little timid Sally, glad to be out in this lively air, her eyes and mind on Oscar doubtless, and in the same corral, shut off from her sight by a projection of the sheds, stood Geronimo. And he saw her, too, for as she waved a hand to us he bared his great teeth and cashed them together. The earth seemed to rock and sink from me. Every soul on the ranch was told to keep away from the corral with the two buffalo skulls over the gates, a warning sufficiently big and gruesome to stop any one. What fatal lapse of memory had struck the girl?

She was beyond help. We were all of two hundred yards away, and Steve still farther; she was not a quarter of that from the brute. If we shouted, if we moved, we might bring her end upon her—and such an end! When I thought of that dainty, pretty little woman beneath those hoofs, I felt a hideous sickness. The man beside me said:

"My God! My mistake!" A corral opened on each side of the box stall in which Geronimo was confined. One of these was usually empty, a reserve. It was into this that Oscar had turned the horse. The other was the corral of the skulls.

Geronimo leaped out. The girl halted, stark, open-mouthed, every sign of life stricken from her at a blow. Geronimo sprang high and snapped at nothing, in evil play before the earnest. It was horrible. We could do neither harm nor good now, so we ran for the spot. It was down hill from us to them. I doubt that anything on two legs ever covered distance as we did, for all the despair.

Geronimo reared and stood upon his hind feet, as straight as a man. He advanced, striking, looming above his victim. "All over," I thought, and tried to take my eyes away. I could not.

At that instant a white-haired, gaunt, tall figure rushed from the stable door, a shovel in its hand, straight between the girl and her destruction. There he stood, with his paltry weapon raised, unflinching. An oath came to my lips and a hot spot to my throat at the sight. No eye ever saw a braver thing.

At this a dip in the ground and the eight-foot fence of the corral shut out all wind. God knows how we got over that fence. I wear it there, leaping it. I have no memory of climbing, but I do recall landing on the other side in a swoop.

Geronimo had old Charley in his teeth, shaking him like a rat.

"Steve!" I called. "Steve!" And then Oscar and I charged at the wicked brute with our pitchforks. All that followed is a tangle, bad dream of hurry, fear, yells, oaths and myself stabbing, stabbing, stabbing with the pitchfork. Then a gun cracked somewhere, a black mass toppled toward me that knocked me sprawling, and all was still. I sat for a moment, smiling foolishly and fumbling for my hat. Oscar raised me by the arm. He still had his revolver in his hand, and his glance on the dead stallion, and asked me if I was hurt, and I said yes. He asked me where, and I said that made no difference. Then, as I came to a little more, I said I guessed I wasn't hurt and looked around. Oscar had Sally in his arms. The tears were running down his cheeks, and he moved his head from side to side, like a man in agony. Her head was buried in his breast, her hands locked around his neck. It was well with them, evidently. But limp upon the ground, his forehead varnished red, lay old Charley.

We turned him over tenderly, wiping the blood away. Steve's lips quivered as he put his hand on the old man's heart. He kept it there a long time. Then he said huskily, "He's gone!"

At the words the sound eyes of the victim popped open with a suddenness that made my heart throw a somersault. It was as sane, calm and undisturbed an optic as ever regarded the world.

"G-a-w-n-h—!" came drawling through the nose of Charley.

We laughed and wiped our eyes with our coat sleeves and got the old boy to his feet.

"Same old Texas," said he, feeling of his head. The hoof had scraped instead of smashing. "Slightly disfigured, but still in the game."

He caught sight of the lover. "Hello!" he said. "Oscar's made his ante good at last—bad hawse works as well as Injuns." We started to lead him by the pair.

"Now, boys," he commanded. "Take me 'round t'other way. That gal don't want to see me now, all bloody and messed up like this."

It was useless to try and make a hero of Charley.

Afterward Oscar told me in private that Charley was an old stiff, and he didn't believe he'd make a chest at a grasshopper if the latter spuked up any. That wronged old Charley. But Oscar must be excused—he was a singularly unhappy man.

To come back to what happened. Oscar that morning had the care of Geronimo, a coal-black, man-eating stallion, a brute as utterly devoid of fear as of decency. A tiger kills to eat, and occasionally for the fun of it; that horse killed out of ferocity and hate of every living thing.

A fearful beast is a bad horse. One really has more chance against a tiger. Geronimo stood seventeen hands high and weighed over 1600 pounds. When he reared on his hind legs and came for you screaming, his teeth snapping like bear traps, his black mane flying, a man seemed a puny antagonist, indeed. One blow from those front hoofs and your troubles were over. Once down, he'd trample, bite and kick you until your own mother would hesitate to claim the pile of rags and jelly he left. He had served two men so already; nothing but his matchless beauty saved his life.

Nowhere could one find a better example of hell-beautiful than when he tore around his corral in a tantrum, as lithe and graceful as a black panther. His mane stood on end; his eyes and nostrils were of a color; the muscles looked to be bursting through the silken gloom of his coat. His swiftness was something incredible. He caught and most horribly killed Jim Baxter's hound before the latter could get out of the corral—and a bearhound is a pretty agile animal. We had to tie Jim, or he'd made an end of Geronimo. He left the ranch right after that. The loss of his dog broke him all up.

We fed and watered Geronimo with a pitchfork, and in terror they for his slyness and cunning were on a par with his other pleasant peculiarities. One of the poor devils he killed entered the stable all unsuspecting. Geronimo had broken his chains and stood close against the wall of his stall in the darkness, waiting. The man came within reach. Suddenly a black mass of flesh flashed in the air above him, coming down with all four hoofs—and that's enough of that story.

A nice pet was Geronimo. An excellent decoration for a gentleman's stable—stuffed!

Well, Oscar turned him out this morning, and then he, Steve and I went for hay. As it was toward the last of winter all the near stacks had been used up, and we had to haul from Kennedy's bottom, eight miles away. When we started the air was still and frozen, with a deep, biting cold unusual to Dakota; the sort that searches you and steals all the heat you own. We were numb by the time we reached the stack and glad enough to have warm work to do. We felt to it with a rush for that reason, and because a

each other that I drop everything I lay my hands on, and I feel as if I'd robbed somebody for the rest of the day."

The interview over, Oscar came out, burning with his own embarrassment, and made a sore mess of everything he did for the next hour. A man must have his mind about him on a ranch.

Once upon a time Steve came to Charley and me, literally prancing. We had heard oaths and yells and sounds of a battle royal previously, and wondered what was going on. When he neared us he moved slowly, his hands working like machinery.

"I would like to know," he began, and stopped to glare at us and grind his teeth. "I should like to know," he continued, in a voice so weak with rage we could hardly hear it, "who turned the red bull into number 3 corral?"

Charley and I went right on cleaning out the shed. We weren't going to tell on Oscar.

"So it's him again, eh?" shrieked Steve. "Well, now I propose to show him something. I'll show him everything!" He was entirely beyond the influence of reason and grammar.

The New Testament does not give much encouragement to people who look upon money as the chief desideratum. It is constantly pointing out the danger of letting the money-getting instinct overtop every ambition, and constantly warns against trust in accumulated riches. It points out the perils that environ the rich man and its emphasis is altogether upon the riches of the soul which come through the avenues of thought, feeling, love and service.

It is never too late to search ourselves touching our estimate of money. Exactly how sordid and commercial are we, every one of us? To what extent do we cling to gold and silver and the things which they represent? Neither is it too late to resolve that we will in the coming twelve months subordinate the passion and the race for money to our better selves and determine that whether or not 1905 brings to us all that we think we need of cold cash we will make it yield to us a nobler personal life.

THE FARRON.

in the bullpen one night with "I wish the Injuns would jump this ranch!"

"You do?" said Charley. "Well, durn your hide for that wish! What's got into you to make you wish that?"

"Aw!" said Oscar, twitching around on his stool. "I'm sick and tired of not being able to say anything. If the Sioux got up I could do something."

"Oh, that's it," retorted Charley. "Well, Oscar, far's I can see, if it's necessary to have a war party of Injuns whoopin' an' yellin' an' crow-hoppin' an' makin' fancywork out of people to give you the proper start afore your gal, it'd be jes' as well for you to stay single the res' of your days. The results wouldn't justify the trouble."

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