

# LEADS AND CROSSSES

Sign by Which the Ranch Queen Recalled a Wanderer.

By O. HENRY.

Baldy Woods reached for the bottle and got it. Whenever Baldy went for anything he usually— But this is not Baldy's story. He poured out a third drink that was larger by a finger than the first and second. Baldy was in consultation, and the consultant is worthy of his hire.

"I'd be king if I was you," said Baldy, so positively that his hoister creaked and his spurs rattled.

"If a man marries a queen it oughtn't to make him a two spot," declared Webb, epitomizing his grievances.

"Stare not," said Baldy, sympathetic, still thirsty and genuinely solicitous concerning the relative value of the cards. "By rights you're a king. If I was you I'd call for a new deal. The cards have been stacked on you. I'll tell you what you are, Webb Yeager."

"What?" asked Webb, with a hopeful look in his pale blue eyes.

"You're a prince consort."

"Go easy," said Webb. "I never blackguarded you none."

"It's a title," explained Baldy, "up among the picture cards, but it don't take no tricks. I'll tell you, Webb, it's a brand they've got for certain animals in Europe. Say that you or me or one of them Dutch dukes marries in a royal family. Well, by and by your wife gets to be queen. Are you king? Not in a million years. At the coronation ceremonies we march between a little casino and the ninth grand custodian of the royal hall bedchamber. The only use we are in is to appear in photographs and accept the responsibility for the heir apparent. That ain't no square deal. Yes, sir, Webb, you're a prince consort, and if I was you I'd start an interregnum or a habeas corpus or something, and I'd be king if I had to turn from the bottom of the deck."

Baldy emptied his glass to the ratification of his Warwick pose.

"Baldy," said Webb solemnly, "me and you punched cows in the same outfit for years. We been runnin' on the same range and ridin' the same trails since we was boys. I wouldn't talk about my family affairs to nobody but you. You was line rider on the Nopalito ranch when I married Santa McAllister. I was foreman then. But what am I now? I don't amount to a knot in a stake rope."

"When old McAllister was the cattle king of west Texas," continued Baldy, with satanic sweetness, "you was some tallow. You had as much to say on the ranch as he did."

"I did," admitted Webb, "up to the time he found out I was tryin' to get my rope over Santa's head. Then he kept me out on the range as far from

"ARE YOU GOING TO LEAVE ME, WEBB?"

the ranch house as he could. When the old man died they commenced to call Santa the 'cattle queen.' I'm boss of the cattle—that's all. She tends to all the business. She handles all the money. I can't sell even a beef steer to a party of campers myself. Santa's the 'queen,' and I'm Mr. Nobody."

"I'd be king if I was you," repeated Baldy Woods, the royalist.

The smooth brown face of Yeager lengthened to a mask of wounded melancholy.

"I'm ridin' back to the ranch to-day," he said half heartedly. "I've got to start a bunch of beeves for San Antonio in the mornin'."

"I'm your company as far as Dry Lake," announced Baldy. "I've got a roundup camp on the San Marcos cuttin' out two-year-olds."

The two companions mounted their ponies and trotted away from the little railroad settlement where they had foregathered in the thirsty morning.

At Dry Lake, where their routes diverged, they reined up for a parting cigarette. Webb offered an addendum to the conversation that had begun ten miles away.

"You remember yourself, Baldy, that there was a time when Santa wasn't quite so independent. You remember the days when old McAllister was keepin' us apart and how she used to send me the sign that she wanted to see me? Old man M. promised to make me look like a colar. If I ever come in gunshot of the ranch. You remember the sign she used to send, Baldy—the heart with a cross inside."

"Me?" cried Baldy, with intoxicated archness. "You old sugar stealin' coyote! Don't I remember! Why, you dabbled old long horned turtledove, the boys in camp was all cognoscent about them hieroglyphs. The 'gizzard and crossbones' we used to call 'em. We used to see 'em on truck that was sent out from the ranch. They was marked in charcoal on the sacks of flour and in lead pencil on the newspapers."

"Santa's fad?" explained Webb

wouldn't write to me or send me any word. That heart and cross sign was her scheme. Whenever she wanted to see me in particular she managed to put that mark on somethin' at the ranch that she knew I'd see."

"The last time Santa sent me the sign," said Webb, "was once when she was sick. I noticed it as soon as I hit camp, and I galloped Pinto forty mile that night. I went to the house. Old McAllister met me at the door. 'Did you come here to get killed?' says he. 'I'll disoblige you for once. I just started a Mexican to bring you. Santa wants you. Go in that room and see her and then come out and see me.'"

"But she gives out a kind of a smile, and her hand and mine look horns, and I sets down by the bed—mud and spurs and chaps and all. 'I've heard you ridin' across the grass for hours. Webb,' she says, 'I was sure you'd come. You saw the sign?' she whispers. The minute I hit camp, says I, 'Twas marked on the bag of potatoes and onions? They're always together,' says she, soft-like—'always together in life.' 'They go well together,' I says, 'in a stew.' 'I mean hearts and crosses,' says Santa. 'Our sign—to love and to suffer—that's what they mean.' There was old Doc Mingsgrove amusin' himself with whisky and a palm leaf fan. And by and by Santa goes to sleep, and Doc feels her forehead, and he says to me: 'You're not such a bad refrigate, but you'd better slide out now, for the diagnosis don't call for you in regular doses. The little lady'll be all right when she wakes up.'"

"I seen old McAllister outside. 'She's asleep,' says I, 'and now you can start in with your colander work. Take your time, for I left my gun on my saddle horn.'"

"Old Mac laughs, and he says to me: 'Pumpin' lead into the best ranch boss in west Texas don't seem to me good business policy. I don't know where I could get as good a one. It's the son-in-law idea, Webb, that makes me admire you for to use you as a target. You ain't my idea for a member of the family. But I can use you on the Nopalito if you'll keep outside of a radius with the ranch house in the middle of it.'"

Baldy Woods pulled down his hat and uncured his leg from his saddle horn. Webb shortened his rein, and his pony danced, anxious to be off. The two men shook hands with western ceremony.

"Adios, Baldy," said Webb. "I'm glad I seen you and had this talk."

At 8 o'clock on the following morning Bud Turner rolled from his saddle in front of the Nopalito ranch house and stumbled with whizzing wheels toward the gallery. Bud was in charge of the bunch of beef cattle that was to strike the trail that morning for San Antonio. Mrs. Yeager was on the gallery watering a cluster of hyacinths growing in a red earthenware jar.

"King" McAllister had bequeathed to his daughter many of his strong characteristics—his resolution, his gay courage, his contumacious self reliance, his pride as a reigning monarch of hoofs and horns. Allegro and foristic tone had been McAllister's tempo and tone. In Santa they survived, transposed to the feminine key.

Webb stood on one edge of the gallery giving orders to two or three sub-bosses of various camps and outfits who had ridden in for instructions.

"Morali!" said Bud briefly. "Where do you want them beeves to go in town—to Barber's, as usual?"

Now, to answer that had been the prerogative of the queen. All the reins of business—buying, selling and banking—had been held by her capable fingers. The handling of the cattle had been intrusted fully to her husband. In the days of "King" McAllister Santa had been his secretary and helper, and she had continued her work with wisdom and profit. But before she could reply the prince consort spoke up with calm decision:

"You drive that bunch to Zimmerman and Nesbit's pens. I spoke to Zimmerman about it some time ago."

Bud turned on his high boot heels.

"Wait!" called Santa quickly. She looked at her husband with surprise in her steady gray eyes.

"Why, what do you mean, Webb?" she asked, with a small wrinkle gathering between her brows. "I never deal with Zimmerman and Nesbit. Barber has handled every head of stock from this ranch in that market for five years. I'm not going to take the business out of his hands." She faced Bud Turner. "Deliver those cattle to Barber," she concluded positively. Bud gazed at the water jar hanging on the gallery, stood on his other leg and chewed a mesquite leaf.

"I want this bunch of beeves to go to Zimmerman and Nesbit," said Webb, with a frosty light in his eyes.

"Nonsense!" said Santa impatiently. "You'd better start on Bud, so as to noon at the Little Elm water hole. Tell Barber we'll have another lot of culs ready in about a month."

Bud allowed a hesitating eye to steal upward and meet Webb's. Webb saw apology in his look and fancied he saw commiseration.

"You deliver them cattle," he said grimly, "to—"

"Barber," finished Santa sharply. "Let that settle it. Is there anything else you are waiting for, Bud?"

"No, m'm," said Bud. But before going he lingered while a cow's tail could have switched thrice.

"You hear your boss!" cried Webb sardonically. He took off his hat and bowed until it touched the floor before his wife.

"Webb," said Santa rebukingly, "you're actin' mighty foolish today."

"Court fool, your majesty," said Webb in his slow tones, which had changed their quality. "What else can you expect? Let me tell you. I was a man before I married a cattle queen. What am I now? The laughin' stock of the camps. I'll be a man again."

Santa looked at him closely.

"Don't be unreasonable, Webb," she said calmly. "You haven't been slighted in any way. Do I ever interfere in your management of the cattle? I know the business side of the ranch much better than you do. I learned it from dad. Be sensible."

"Kingdoms and empires," said

the prince, "as you see I punch a little, and you wear the crown. All right. I'd rather be high lord chancellor of a cow camp than the eight spot in a queen high flush. It's your ranch, and Barber gets the beeves."

Webb swung up into the saddle. His serious, smooth face was without expression except for a stubborn light that smoldered in his eyes.

"There's a herd of cows and calves," said he, "near the Honda water hole on the Rio that ought to be moved away from timber. Lobos have killed three of the calves. I forgot to leave orders. Tell Simms to attend to it."

Santa laid a hand on the horse's bridle and looked her husband in the eye.

"Are you going to leave me, Webb?" she asked quietly.

"I am goin' to be a man again," he answered.

"I wish you success in a praiseworthy attempt," she said, with a sudden coldness. She turned and walked directly into the house.

Webb Yeager rode to the southeast as straight as the topography of west Texas permitted, and when he reached the horizon he might have ridden on into blue space as far as knowledge of him on the Nopalito went.

One day a being named Bartholomew, a sheepman, and therefore of Rio Grande country rode in sight of the Nopalito ranch house and felt hunger assail him. Ex consternation he was soon seated at the midday dining table of that hospitable kingdom. Talk like water rushed from him.

"Missis Yeager," he babbled, "I see a man the other day on the Rancho Seco, down in Hidalgo county, by your name—Webb Yeager was his. He'd just been engaged as manager. He was a tall, light haired man, not sayin' much. Maybe he was some kin of yours, do you think?"

"A husband," said Santa cordially. "The Seco has done well. Mr. Yeager is one of the best stockmen in the west."

The dropping out of a prince consort rarely disorganizes a monarchy. Queen Santa had appointed as mayor domo of the ranch a trusty subject named Ramsay, who had been one of her father's faithful vassals. And there was scarcely a ripple on the Nopalito ranch save when the gulf breeze created undulations in the grass of its wide acres.

For several years the Nopalito had been making experiments with an English breed of cattle that looked down with aristocratic contempt upon the Texas longhorns. The experiments were found satisfactory, and a pasture had been set apart for the blue bloods. The fame of them had gone forth into the chaparral.

As a consequence one day a sun-burned, capable, silk kerchiefed, non-chalant youth, furnished with revolvers and attended by three Mexican vaqueros, alighted at the Nopalito ranch and presented the following businesslike epistle to the queen thereof:

Mrs. Yeager, the Nopalito Ranch:

Dear Madam—I am instructed by the owners of the Rancho Seco to purchase 100 head of two and three year old cows of the Sussex breed owned by you. If you can fill the order please deliver the cattle to the bearer, and a check will be forwarded to you at once. Respectfully,

W. B. BARBER, Manager of the Rancho Seco.

Business is business, even—very

scantly did it escape being written "especially"—in a kingdom.

That night the hundred head of cattle were driven up from the pasture and penned in a corral near the ranch house for delivery in the morning.

When night closed down and the house was still dim, Santa Yeager threw herself down, clasping that formal note to her bosom, weeping and calling out a name that pride told her was the name of the bell tower (either in one or the other had kept from her lips many a day, or did she file the letter in her business way, retaining her royal balance and strength?)

Wonder, if you will, but royalty is sacred, and there is a veil. But this much you shall learn:

At midnight Santa slipped softly out of the ranch house, clothed in something dark and plain. She paused for a moment under the live oak trees. Santa turned her face to the south-east, and there was none to see.

Then she sped silently to the blacksmith shop, fifty yards away, and what she did there can only be surmised. But the forge glowed red, and there was a faint hammering such as Cupid might make when he sharpens his arrow points.

Later she came forth with a queer shaped handled thing in one hand and a portable furnace such as are seen in branding camps in the other. To the corral where the Sussex cattle were penned she sped with these things swiftly in the moonlight.

She opened the gate and slipped inside the corral. The Sussex cattle were mostly a dark red, but among this bunch was one that was milky white—notable among the others.

And now Santa shook from her shoulder something that we had not seen before—a rope lasso. She freed the loop of it, coiling the length in her left hand, and plunged into the thick of the

The white cow was her object. She swung the lasso, which caught one horn and slipped off.

Again she made the cast, while the aroused cattle milled around the four sides of the corral in a plunging mass. This time was fair, the white cow came to earth again, and before it could rise Santa had made the lasso fast around a post of the corral with a swift and simple knot and had leaped upon the cow again with the raw hide hobble.

In one minute the feet of the animal were tied. She ran swiftly to her fence at the gate and brought the branding iron, white hot.

The bellow of the outraged white cow as the iron was applied should have stirred the slumbering articular nerves and consciences of the nearby subjects of the Nopalito, but it did not. And it was amid the deepest nocturnal silence that Santa ran like a lapping duck to the ranch house and there fell upon a cot and sobbed—sobbed as though queens had hearts as simple ranchmen's wives have and as though she would gladly make kings of prince consorts should they ride back again from over the hills and far away.

In the morning the capable, revived youth and his vaqueros set forth driving the bunch of Sussex cattle across the prairies to the Rancho Seco.

The beasts arrived at Rancho Seco one evening at dusk and were received and counted by the foreman.

The next morning at 8 o'clock a horseman topped out of the brush to the Nopalito ranch house. He dismounted stiffly and strode with whizzing spurs to the house. His horse gave a great sigh and swayed forward, streaked, with down drooping head and closed eyes.

But waste not your pity upon Belshazzar, the flea bitten sorrel. Today in Nopalito horse pasture he survives, pampered, beloved, unriden, cherished record holder of long distance rides.

The horseman stumbled into the house. Two arms fell around his neck, and some one cried out in the voice of woman and queen alike, "Webb—oh, Webb!"

"I was a skunk," said Webb Yeager. "Hush," said Santa. "Did you see it?"

"I saw it," said Webb.

What they meant God knows, and you shall know if you rightly read the primer of events.

"Be the cattle queen," said Webb, "and overlook it if you can. I was a mangy, sheep stealin' coyote."

"Hush!" said Santa again, laying her fingers upon his mouth. "There's no queen here. Do you know who I am? I am Santa Yeager, first lady of the bedchamber. Come here."

She dragged him from the gallery into the room to the right. There stood a cradle with an infant in it—a red, ribald, unintelligible, babbling, beautiful infant, spluttering at life in an unseemly manner.

"There's no queen on this ranch," said Santa again. "Look at the king. He's got your eyes, Webb. Down on your knees and look at his highness."

But jingling rowels sounded on the gallery, and Bud Turner stumbled there again with the same query that he had brought with a year ago.

"Morali!" Then beeves is just turned out on the trail. Shall I drive 'em to Barber's?"

He saw Webb and stopped.

"Ba-ba-ba-ba-ba!" shrieked the king in his cradle, beating the air.

"You hear your boss, Bud," said Webb Yeager, with a broad grin, just as he had said a year ago.

And that is all, except that when Old Man Quinn, owner of the Rancho Seco, went out to look over the herd of Sussex cattle that he had bought from the Nopalito ranch he asked his new manager:

"What's the Nopalito ranch brand, Wilson?"

"X bar Y," said Wilson.

"I thought so," said Quinn. "But look at that white heifer there; she's got another brand—a heart with a cross inside of it. What brand is that?"

## LIBERTY BELL.

Its Connection With the Declaration of Independence.

The famous Liberty bell was cast in London in 1752, brought to America and subsequently recast in Philadelphia. It bears the inscription, "Proclaim Liberty Throughout the World and to All the Inhabitants Thereof." It was cracked while being tolled after the death of Chief Justice John Marshall in 1835. It is kept on exhibition in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. It has had a fictitious importance owing to the popular belief that its ringing proclaimed the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Concerning this belief, how Mr. Friedman (1904) says:

"There is no shadow of authority even for associating the ringing of the bell with the announcement of the agreement upon independence. The mythical legend of the blue eyed boy watching outside the door to give the signal to the man in the bell tower is the product of the fertile imagination of one of Philadelphia's early romancers, George Lippard, who first gave currency to it in his appropriately called 'Legends of the Revolution.' This book was published in 1847."—New York American.

## His Experience.

"Jasper," said Mrs. Grigson, who was looking over the morning paper, "there's a story of a woman who was robbed on a street car in broad daylight, and yet the thief got away unsuspected."

Mrs. Grigson said that he had seen the item, but that it was either a typographical error or else the story was pure invention.

"Why do you say that?" asked his wife.

"Look at the item again. It says her purse contained \$100 in currency, does it not?"

"Yes."

"It says there was also a receipted bill for a five dollar hat, does it not?"

"Yes."

"Well, no woman with \$100 in cash in her possession would buy a five dollar hat,"—Youth's Companion.

## Her Long Dream.

Estelle—Ah! His proposal was just like a dream!

Agnes—Well, you ought to know dear. You've been dreaming of that proposal for years.

## Noel—A Ballad For Christmas

The bells chime happily across the night—  
The night that crowns the almost dying year—  
And soon the morning, with its dawn light,  
Proclaims that Christmas day at last is here.

The children high aloft the boar's head bring,  
And as they march their merry carols sing.

While Christmas joins in their tune-fair lay,  
For at this season all are glad and gay.

And men and women, with their hearts aglow,  
Shout out with one accord on Christmas day.

"Hail to the Yule log and the mistletoe!"

Emblems of many an old time honored rite,  
Of bolsterous mirth and homely, honest cheer;

The Yule log, flaming high and blazing bright;

The mistletoe, to youths and maidens dear.

See for snapdragon how they form a ring

Or in a contradance their partners swing?

Lord of merrile makes good his sobriquet,  
And all his mandates eagerly obey.

He wields the scepter and with loud hallo

Cries lustily, with none to say him nay,

"Hail to the Yule log and the mistletoe!"

All elms and classes own the season's might,

It rules alike the peasant and the peer;

The humblest home presents a happy sight;

The sternest judge forgets to look severe.

The very birds fly by on lighter wing;

The blustering north wind seems to lose its sting;

The old and young, the golden haired and gray,

Devote the hours to merriment and play.

And far across the crispy, crackling snow

We hear a chorus from a flying snow-bird,

"Hail to the Yule log and the mistletoe!"

The chosen theme of many a fancy's flight;

A ballad monger or a sonneteer

Yearly his Christmas poem will indite

Of a coy maiden and her cavalier,

Shakespeare full often had his merry fling,

And Milton tuned his harp to noble string;

Irving the scenes of Christmas could betray,

And Dickens its true spirit could convey.

To song and story a rich debt we owe,

And with triumphant cheer this tribute pay.

"Hail to the Yule log and the mistletoe!"

And as the sacred season circles near

All evil thoughts and themes are banished quite;

Our lives become more gentle and sincere;

Our hearts can find no room for dole or spite,

Paens of praise from thankful hearts uprising

To celebrate the birthday of the King,

All humbly for our brother's weal we pray

And ask a blessing on our future way;

Our generous gifts on others we bestow;

"Peace upon earth, good will to men!" we say.

"Hail to the Yule log and the mistletoe!"

## ENVOY.

Spirit of Christmas, we accept thee—

Rig'ly, willingly we bow beneath thy sway;

We join our songs to those of long ago

With this refrain, for ever and for aye,

"Hail to the Yule log and the mistletoe!"

—Carolyn Wells in New York Mail.

## His Critic.

"The greatest compliment that I ever received," says Ople Read, "was a criticism. Several years ago I went to Arkansas and visited the scene where one of my stories is laid. The landlord of the little hotel said to me:

"Here comes a little old fellow to whom I loaned a copy of your book. He can't read, but his wife reads to him. Let's see what he says about the book."

"Hello, Jason, did your wife read that to you?"

"Mawmin," sah. Yes, she done read it to me."

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"Huh? That ain't no book at all. I done lived hear fo' forty yeas an' I done hearn folks talk that a-way all th' time."—Cincinnati Inquirer.

## Christmas Eve In Rural England

It was a brilliant moonlight night, but extremely cold. Our chairs whirled rapidly over the frozen ground. The postboy smacked his whip incessantly and a part of the time his horses were on a gallop. "He knows where he is going," said my companion, laughing, "and is eager to arrive in time for some of the merriment and good cheer of the servants' hall. My father is a devotee of the old school and prides himself on keeping up something of old English hospitality. He was always scrupulous in exacting our holidays and having us around him on family festivals. It was the policy of the good old gentleman to make his children feel that home was the happiest place in the world, and I value this delicious home feeling as one of the choicest gifts a parent can bestow."

The squire ushered us at once to the company, which was assembled in a large, old fashioned hall. It was composed of different branches of a numerous family connection. They were variously occupied, and a profusion of wooden horses, penny trumpets and tattered dolls about the floor showed traces of a little troop of fairy beings that had frolicked through a happy day.

While the mutual greetings were going on between Bracebridge and his relatives I had time to scan the apartment. The grate had been removed

from the wide, overhanging fireplace to make way for a fire of wood, in the midst of which was an enormous log, glowing and blazing and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat. This, I understood, was the Yule log, which the squire was particular in having brought in and illumined on Christmas eve, according to ancient custom.

It was really delightful to see the old squire seated in his hereditary elbow chair by the hospitable fireside of his ancestors and looking around him like the sun of a system, beaming warmth and gladness to every heart. Even the very dog that lay stretched at his feet, as he lazily shifted his position and yawned, would look fondly up in his master's face, wag his tail—just the floor and stretch himself, again to sleep, sure of kindness and protection.

Supper was announced shortly after our arrival. It was served up in a spacious oaken chamber, the panels of which shone with wax and around which were several family portraits, decorated with holly and ivy. Besides the accustomed lights, two great wax tapers, called Christmas candles, wreathed with greens, were placed on a highly polished buffet among the family plate. The table was abundantly spread with substantial fare, but the squire made his supper of frummenty, a dish made of wheat cakes boiled in milk, with rich spices