

White River breaks from Lost Spring Creek on the west to Eagle Land sand hills on the east, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles.

"And we're sure going to hold them fever struck cattle from Texas all the way along the line," he volunteered with assurance. He explained that they were on the keen lookout for one particular herd, which was rotten with the fever.

Soon the cowboy's partner, Jim Vesey, had alighted and was sitting with us. We gave him welcome after the manner of the range. And five minutes later I was cooking supper for him while the cowmen talked freely together.

At the end of two hours I had learned all that I wanted to know, and had, I fancied, gained the entire good will of our visitors. "Boys," I said finally, "as long as you have only these passes to guard, why don't you take it easy? Just make yourselves at home in our camp."

The following morning I went after blacktail, and American Horse hunted farther afield. We had venison for dinner, and Alf and Jim, our quarantine guards, as they called each other, ate a hearty meal and rested. Then they mounted their ponies and left our camp.

About five o'clock American Horse came in with a report that was exciting. He had met the Panhandle herd seven or eight miles out, and had succeeded in informing the drivers of the situation which lay in front of them. They were angry—"heap mad," as American Horse expressed it. They were ready to push their herd through the quarantine at all hazards, and had on their fighting clothes.

"Now, to manage these guards," I said in Sioux, "we've got to put them out of action somehow, for there will be enough opposition without having to contend with these fellows."

"Let my brother rest easy," said American Horse. "My young men are ready."

It was about dusk when Alf and Jim again came into our camp. Finally they were dozing in front of our fire.

It had now come to blow hard from the northwest, and a fine mist of rain was falling. The night was black. In ten minutes both were snoring in the dead sleep of weary riders of the plains.

American Horse and myself sat opposite each other, and presently the chief grinned at me in a suggestive way. I got up quietly and slipped into the shadows of the trees. When I had secured a proper position, I stood behind a dead trunk and peered back into the circle of firelight. I saw the chief lean forward and crawl softly toward the sleepers; saw him, with the deftness of a sleight of hand performer, remove two pairs of Colts from their holsters, and move away into the darkness.

We slipped softly away to our ponies, and rode at an easy pace down off the ridge and into the foothills. Within a cluster of chaparral at the opening of a coulee we dismounted and awaited events. After an hour or more of silence horsemen began to gather at the edge of our cover, until a score of figures were dimly outlined at the distance of a dozen yards.

#### Finding the Cattle

**N**OW, *Mato Iahan* [Talking Bear]," said American Horse, "let us drive our cattle through the pass."

In silence we mounted our ponies and put ourselves at the head of a cavalcade of blanketed Sioux. For a half-hour longer we rode in the darkness, American Horse leading the way. Then a long, drawn "How-o-o-up!" admonished us that a herd of cattle and their drivers were in our front. The chief and myself went forward, and succeeded in finding the bunched herd and a squad of half a dozen cowboys. I made myself known to them, and their foreman drew alongside.

"How!" he said. "What's next on the program?"

"We'll drive the herd forward," I said, "under guidance of the Sioux."

It was perhaps an hour later that we reached the heights of the breaks. It was still dark, though not raining, and we were wholly dependent upon our Indian guides to pilot us through a pass. These rode in advance, directing the tongue of the herd, as it appeared, by instinct.

All was apparently going swimmingly with us, and we had reason to hope that we should elude the quarantine posts, when upon our left at a little distance a single blue light rose and flashed over our heads, illuminating cattle and riders in a ghostly radiance.

This was the signal rocket of a posted picket. It was answered by another in the near distance, as I thought on the other side of the pass for which we were steering. Evidently Alf and Jim had awakened, and, though minus revolvers, were not without

the weapons to do us mischief. Instantly our fore riders halted the herd, bunching our cattle in a compact mass. Soon the foreman and myself had come together for hurried consultation.

While we were canvassing the situation, there burst out of a nearby ravine a half-dozen riders, whirling fire balls—balls of rags soaked in kerosene—at their ropes' ends and yelling like inhabitants of Hades. They went through our lines, strangely unobstructed, and hurled themselves and their snakes of fire into the midst of our cattle. They had charged the herd on the side guarded by the Indians. The cowmen on the other flank fired over the backs of the startled cattle. Our Indians appeared to have vanished at first sight of the "fire snakes." Instantly we were in the midst of a roaring stampede, and the attacking party had thrown their fire ropes on the ground and sped to cover.

#### A Perilous Ride

**I**N my surprise I sat, unheeding the foreman's warning as he dashed away, and was caught inextricably for a brief moment in front of the stampede. There was nothing to do but ride with the herd, working ahead and to one side as opportunity should offer. The danger, of course, was frightful; a single misstep of my horse, a boulder, a badger's hole, or a stout sagebrush would have bowled me under the hoofs of the cattle. Worse than this, we were running along a ridge of the breaks, and a turn of the crazy herd might at any moment hurl us over cliffs hundreds of feet in height.

These breaks for a hundred miles are approached on the south by easy grades, and then fall away in

peered into the depths of the cañon. In no time at all, as it seemed to me, I was made aware of the presence and activity of the quarantine guards; above me and on either side there was a flash of guns, though I could hear nothing above the tumult of the stampede. The herd swept by, and I heard the yells of the Sioux and a rattle of guns below. Nothing more wildly exciting could have been imagined. The Sioux were replying to the fire upon the cliffs, and for a minute or two the blaze and crackle of their shots was continuous. These wild fellows were having the time of their lives, shooting joyously at flashes of pistols on the scarps.

In this moment I realized that American Horse and his Sioux had made a genuine coup, and I backed my pony down the slope lest a bullet from the excited fellows should pierce my own skin. My horse got down among them after some fashion. The firing ceased, and we rode on at the tail of our stampeding herd.

In twenty minutes we were out of the cañon and thundering across White River bottom. Nor did we stop or reduce our progress until the exhausted cattle, having been pushed and guided by those indomitable Sioux, came to a stand to breathe.

Although we were now near to the Dakota line, we gave our cattle only a brief rest, then drove them on till tolerably well satisfied that we had passed the confines of Nebraska. Then we rounded up our tired bunch and rested until daylight. We were feeling good when morning came. We believed that we were now safe from further interference of the quarantine. And so we made coffee and had breakfast—as jolly a crowd of whites and reds as ever were got together.

We were finishing breakfast, when some one shouted, "Look yonder! There they come!" On the southern slopes, a crowd of horse men, not less than thirty in number, were coming at a racing pace. They were no more than a mile away—the quarantine guards—and would be upon us in five minutes. I had not counted upon so desperate a move as this, and was nonplussed for the moment. Cowboys and Indians jumped to their feet, with fierce ejaculations, and each man seized his gun and rushed for his picketed pony. White men and Sioux were excited to the limit, fierce for an encounter.

On came the vengeful cavalcade, every second bringing nearer the crisis, when American Horse, who was standing quietly at my side, turned to me.

"*Mato Iahan*," he said, "see!" and he drew from the folds of his hunting shirt, which I had noted was uncommonly stuffed, a long roll wrapped in dirty oiled silk. He rapidly unfolded this and displayed a silken flag of the United States.

"Him," he said, "General Crook—he give me." He thrust it into my hands and ran to a patch of willows which grew upon the bank of the run where we had camped. In a minute he was back again with a light pole ten or twelve feet in length. I understood his object as with deft fingers he tied on the flag by its leathern strings. When he had finished I seized the pole, ran to my pony, and sprang into the saddle.

#### Ready for the Crisis

**L**INE up, men!" I shouted. "Get into ranks!"

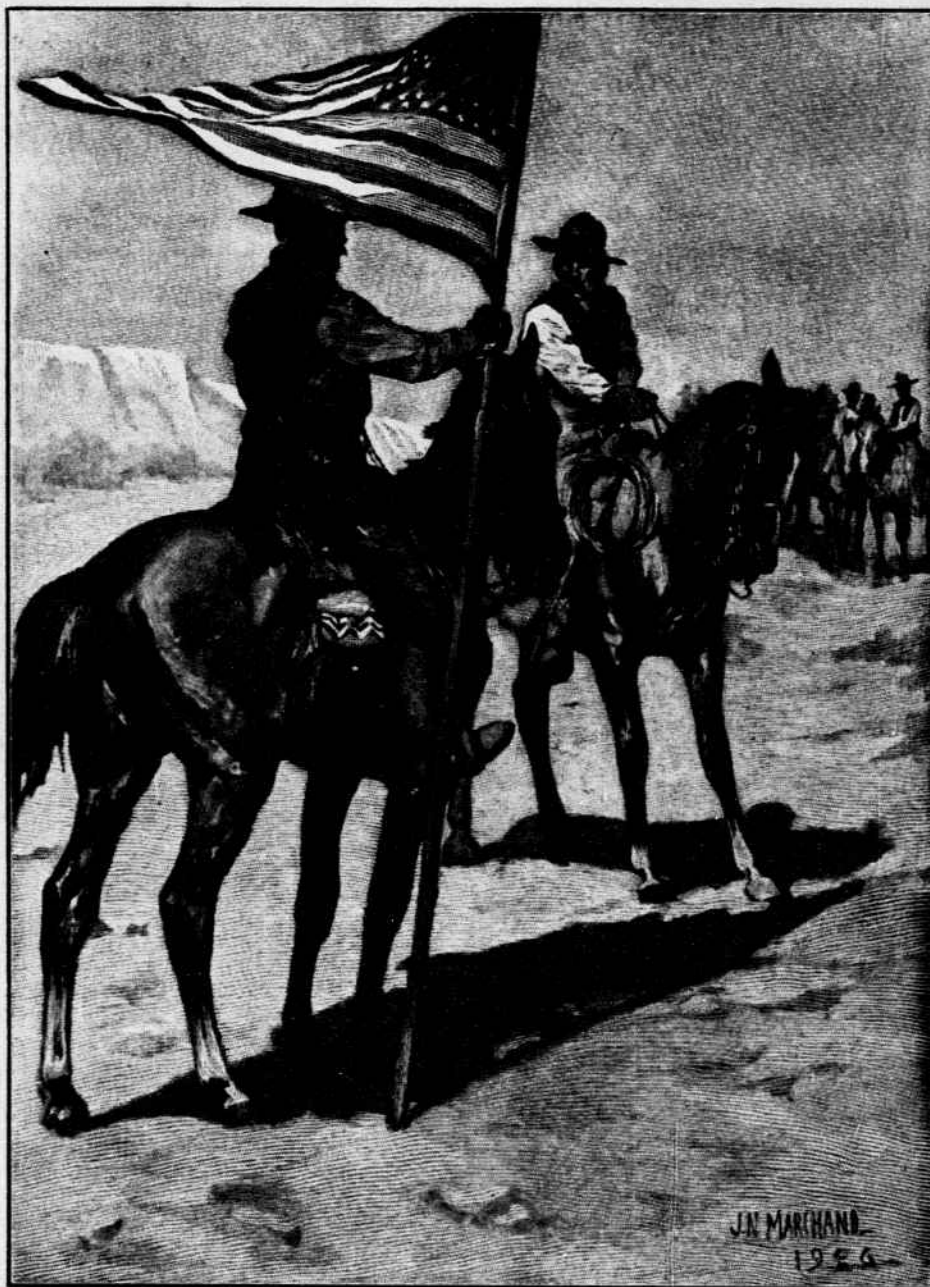
For a minute we sat in silence while the cowmen bore down upon us. Then, leaving the men in line, and with the United States flag flying above my head, I rode to meet the quarantine guard. These, evidently impressed by the unfurling of the flag, halted at fifty yards, and their leader came forward. I recognized him at once as a cattleman of years of experience.

"Well," he asked in a smooth and pleasant voice, "what does that flag mean?"

Without hesitation I answered, in the same indifferent tone of voice, "It means simply this, that a herd of sound and healthy cattle, contracted for by the United States Government, have been driven up from the Panhandle and are now delivered to the Indians of Blank Agency. I am appointed to receive these cattle, and will see them through to their destination. I understand the situation thoroughly, and am prepared to go to extremities if I must. I know what you have come for. You may be able to whip my Indians—probably will—but in the end you will have a regiment of United States cavalry to take care of your insurrection."

He sat for a moment looking me straight in the eye, and then grinned clear across his face. "I reckon," he said, "you hold four aces."

"You may be very sure I do," I replied. "So long!" he said, and galloped away to his men. He talked with them for two or three minutes, and then, with a flourish of arms, the cavalcade of the quarantine wheeled and galloped away toward the breaks.



"I Reckon You Hold Four Aces," He Said.

sheer or precipitous ledges which stand like huge battlements guarding the prairies a thousand feet below. Only here and there are feasible passes for big herds such as ours.

We were going in a thundering rout, and I was still entrapped by the herd, when I saw the flash of guns in front and upon my right. It was as if a troop of cavalry had opened fire, and an instant later I knew that our stampede had been turned to the left. Still spurring my horse and struggling to get out upon the right, I felt myself dropping down a steep incline. What happened in the next two or three minutes is but a confused memory. I only know that we lunged and plunged in breathless and roaring flight down into the depths of a cañon. I was helpless, and let my horse take his own way and gait. This happened to be wisdom on my part, for somehow the pony forged his way out of the jam and climbed a steep so perpendicular that I had to lean forward flat upon his neck to hold on.

Then, climbing to a scarp, where he must have had to exert every muscle to keep his footing, he halted while the roaring mass went on. In the seconds that followed I secured a firmer seat in my saddle and