

* * * The Story Page * * *

The Cowboy's Last Ride

BY J. BRAINARD BROWN.

The Colorado sun was slowly sinking to rest behind Pike's Peak, tinting the wide expanse with a golden halo and the long shadows were yet marking the green prairies, when the cowboys returned to the "camp" and began to prepare for their fresh air supper, after a hard day's round-up.

The mess-wagon, with harness and saddles bedecking the wheels and tongue, presided over by the stout, good-natured cook "Bob," is the balm for all the cowboys' ills, and tonight as they wearily dismount and turn their ponies loose it seems as though all comforts short of home itself are afforded by the good old cook and mess-wagon.

Tom Murphy is the first one to arrive, and his loquacious good humor, although unrefined and rough, would cheer up the most dreary place of earth, and at least produce enough animation for hearty laughter. As he lazily fell off his horse and eyed the cook's dutch oven, which he was sure contained food enough to at least make him happy, he said: "Cook, thet spunk av a kid, thet D. Trutfit sint down wi' us, is allus spakin' aboot religion."

"Wall," retorted the cook, "oi think ther's fur bein' worse things than religion fur some av you fellers."

Tom returned, "En to be shure there is, but 'twas niver mint for the loikes av us oot hare on the blake plains to be moralizen an the things which be more fittin' to moy moind, fur swate wimmin an' childer. Ivery time wan av us cusses er tells av a funny yarn er th' loike, hay is afther jumpin' onto us fer sayin' what we was not loike our mithers to hear. But talk av the devil, an' it's the russel av his wings ye hear, an' hear he cooms along av the other fellers. Oi loike the kid tho', bad cess to him, an' oi'll stan' bs him through thick an' thin."

Joe, the spunk of a kid that occasioned such comment, was recently from the East, and his big Christian heart had really made a very deep impression on the hardened old cowboys. He had become respected and loved by them already, and was rapidly making himself a favorite with all. His manly qualities and fearlessness had brought him into notice, and Charley Douglas, the fearless rider, the best roper, and the one who was best acquainted with the different stock and the surrounding country, was seen to prefer his company to any other. They had had many rides together; and what was better still, many quiet talks. Charley, cowboy that he was, loved to have Joe tell of his old Christian mother back there in Vermont; how she loved him and prayed for him, and he was often heard to say, "How different would my life have been had I had a mother, and such a one as yours, too."

The boys began to troop in, turn their ponies loose, and while some threw themselves upon the ground to await the time when the cook with all his generosity should cry out, "Bring up your plates and have a bite," others made up their tepees and beds, and some (not all of them) went down to the brook to wash.

Charley and Joe had washed and combed their hair. Some of the fellows were dismounting and some were just riding up when the good old Bob beat his tin pan with the potato-masher, and called out: "Bring up your plates, all ye." The plates, although made of tin, held a delicious repast that night when Bob had finished helping, but still some of the boys thought, "Oh, to have a good old-fashioned home meal again."

Each seated himself upon the grass with his plate and coffee, and many were the sage and witty remarks that went around that circle.

Tom Murphy began by saying, "An' shure, it's a foine bile yez have on these pertaties; Bob. Yer a winnen keerd for a cook. Why, that laime feller we had afore yez coom kudent bile water wi'oot scorchin' it, or else bringin' it in half-doon in the middle." Of course they all reiterated what Tom had said, and even called for more, which Bob took as a sure sign of approval.

When the conversation turned on what horses would be used tomorrow, it was Tom again who started, by saying: "Joe, yer old boss sint yes oot wi' a bad lot of bronks. What yez goin' to ride tomorrow?"

Joe replied: "I think I shall ride that trim Buckskin. He was never ridden but once, but I think I'll saddle him right after supper and ride him a little tonight. I can ride him all right."

Charley said, "Yes, of course you can ride him. You do better now than some of the old hands."

One of the boys thought that Buck would throw him "higher than a kite;" and Tom Murphy even took enough mercy on the boy to say: "Don't be fur killin' yerself, but ride wan av moy harses tomorrow, an' some av us old wans 'll top Buckskin, fur yez before ye ride him."

"It was a mean thing," Charley said, "for them to send seven or eight wild bronks with Joe and expect

him to break them in, but then, Joe, old fellow, you're not the one to be afraid, are you?"

"No, I'm not afraid," said Joe; "but as for riding Buckskin, I don't like it. My employer, however, expects me to do it, and do it I must."

The general opinion of the group was that it was a hazardous thing for this tenderfoot to be riding such a horse as the Buckskin seemed to be, but his mud was evidently made up and he could not be dissuaded.

Just as supper was finished the herder, who watched the herd of horses, according to previous directions, rode up, leading with a long rope the fierce-looking Buckskin. When Joe tried to approach him he snorted and backed up, and it was some time before a bridle and blindfold could be gotten on him. He was, however, comparatively safe when finally blinded, and Joe had no difficulty in getting him saddled and ready to mount.

Of course it was an anxious time for Joe, for he realized that he was really imperiling his own life to carry out what he deemed his duty to his employer.

Oh, the pain and heartaches caused by heartless masters! Oh, the sufferings those in upper places might abolish, could they but realize that their cruelty was extended to some mother's boy, that the victim of their injustice was some one's loved one.

The time came for Joe to mount, and he did it with skill, while all the rest gazed at him as though they had not for these many years been used to the excitement of "bustin' in a new horse."

There was something in Joe's manner, calm, and collected, that plainly designates an excellent horseman, and as he reached over the wild horse's head to raise the blind, his look of determination showed that he fully intended to win in the approaching contest. Some of the boys made jesting remarks about "life insurance," etc., but most were too deeply concerned for the brave boy's safety, and Charley reassured him by calling out, "Keep cool, Joe, you'll come out all right. Don't keep too tight a rein so's to throw him over backward. Now, careful." Joe raised the blindfold. The wild horse, frightened with its strange burden, gave a desperate lunge forward and alighted on his fore feet with his back humped up and his head between his legs. But Joe was ready and the horse's repeated bucks and jumps did not succeed in unseating him.

To be sure the shakes and pounds were painful, and every one but Joe was frightened, but it began to look as though the Eastern lad would bravely succeed in mastering this wild pony, when, see! the pitching is harder and quicker; Joe seems to be suffering pain; blood comes from his nose, and with a sudden, nervous pull he raises the horse's head, but, alas, too far, for the horse falls backward, and lies still for a moment on the ground.

Poor Joe! He is picked up from under the horse. His eyes are closed. He is white as wax. A messenger is sent for a doctor, twenty-five miles away.

Rough cowboy hands carry him to his tent. Hard cowboy hearts feel a pathetic sympathy. Tender cowboy words try to call him back to consciousness. One opens all the folds of the tent to allow fresh air. Tom brings cool water and bathes his forehead. Bob loosens his belt and neckband. But Charley does not cease watching steadily in the face of his friend, for any signs of consciousness. Finally they come. His eyes open! His lips move! And in a low, husky voice he says, "Charley!" Charley does not trust himself to speak, but gently grasps the dying boy's hand, for he realizes that that voice and that look are the voice and look of death.

"Charley," the voice began, "what day of the week is this?"

"Thursday, my boy, said Charley; "but 'do not talk tonight; rest a little while and you'll feel better."

But the voice replied: "No, I must talk. You say it's Thursday?"

"Yes."

"Tonight, back there in billy Vermont, in that little town, tonight in that little church, my mother is praying for me. She little thinks I'm so soon to see that dear Saviour of whom she loved to teach me. I feel I'm slipping, Charley, slipping. Oh, promise me something."

"Yes, my boy," said Charley, "anything; but you must be quiet. The doctor will soon be here now."

"No, I can't be quiet; promise me one thing. Will you write to mother and tell her I was happy in—"

The voice was choked. Those standing by realized that the end was very near. Charley stooped down and softly replied, "Yes, Joe, my boy, just as you say."

There was silence for several minutes, when Joe started up: "Charley, Tom, Bob, all of you, I love you all; you have all been so good to me." Here he paused and great teardrops trickled down the sunburnt faces of those present, and finally he whispered: "Will some one sing me a song, just such as my mother used to sing to me?" Each looked at the others and no one sang. But for want of something better Bob started out on the old cowboy melody:

"Bury me not on the lone prairie,
Where the wild coyote will howl o'er me."

"No, not just that," whispered Joe; "not just that, something, something—" and just then Charley's clear, strong voice broke out in the good, old hymn:

"Jesus lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly."

Oh, how it inspired the uncouth cowboys, and more voices than one took up the strain.

"While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high."

Joe's eyes closed! An ashy paleness crept over his face. His life was surely going. The song proceeded, and at its close not a heart was there but that was fervently praying:

Safe within the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last.

Joe was dead. Now he was really

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on his gentle breast.

And deeply written upon the hearts of every cowboy there was the influence of a Christian life. Away from home, away from friends, but not away from Jesus.

Charley is now studying for the ministry. Tom lives a changed life, and Bob, God bless him, lives a Christian life in his humble sphere, content to belong to the great Master. Joe was humble. He could do no great thing, but he did well his smaller deeds; he lived well his humble life; he died as he had lived, exalting Christ.

Such is the power of true life. Such the influence of Joe, only a cowboy.—Sel.

"Lo, I am With You."

BY MRS. F. M. HOWARD.

It had been a toilsome day—a day when things went wrong from kitchen to attic, and Mrs. Joyce was very tired. Nerve and muscle were alike overtaxed, and it was small wonder she spoke sharply as little Fred clung to her dress and begged her for a "tory."

"Go away, Freddy Joyce, and play with your blocks," she replied irritably. "Mamma can't tell stories all the time."

The lip of the little two-year-old quivered pitifully, not at the refusal alone, but the tone went straight to his sensitive little heart. "Oh dear, my burdens are more than I can bear," she said to herself, as the child's wall of grief fell upon her ear.

"Supper yet to get and clear away before I can rest, and this fretful baby clinging to my skirts."

"Come unto me and I will give you rest." The words flashed into her mind like the glimpse of cool, rippling water, with dipping trees and soft green sward in summer. But the vision passed in a moment, and she said with a sigh: "If it were only more real. If Christ were only here where I could come to him, and tell him all about it."

Just the glimpse of rest even and the aspiration had a soothing effect upon her mind, and she spoke more gently as she said to weeping Freddy: "Mamma's boy can help her by bringing his little basket and picking up the clothes pins," and his baby heart was comforted by the thought of being a helper.

The children came in from school, and Mary had a great tear in her new apron, and again the rasped nerves gave direction to her tongue, and sharp, stinging words of rebuke followed.

"I am sorry, mother," said Mary with a trembling lip. "It has made me unhappy all the afternoon, for I knew you would scold, but indeed I could not help it."

The words fell on the mother's ear with a sharp sting. Was she indeed so unreasonable that her children were sure of sharp words at every accident that befell them? "I am very tired, Mary," she said humbly; "if you will take Freddy for an hour I believe I will lie down and rest."

"Do, mother, it will do you good," replied the little daughter cheerfully. "Freddy is always good with me."

Mrs. Joyce closed her eyes with a grateful sense of rest as her tired head touched the pillow. It seemed so blessed to fold her hands and let the care and burden of the day slip off her weary shoulders, and she thought with a sense of longing how blessed it would be some day, some time, when, with her work all done, she might cross her hands as now and rest.

She was not conscious of sleeping, but the day seemed to have begun again and as it had been in the morning, the children were hurrying to get ready for school, Mr. Joyce to get down to business, and the mother was helping for them all.

Suddenly Mary came to her, saying in an excited whisper:

"Mother, oh mother, Christ has come. He has come to spend the day."

"And I have nothing prepared," said Mrs. Joyce, with a housekeeper's distress. "What will he think of me?"

"Well, what shall I send up?" asked Mr. Joyce in the quick, irritable way of a business man, detained for a moment against his will.

"How can I tell what he would like?" returned Mrs. Joyce, in the rasped tone which her husband's irritation always produced. "Go in and speak with him, Nathan; that is most important."

Very unwillingly and with hurry written on every feature Mr. Joyce stepped into the sitting-room, with his wife following.

How the strained lines of care and worry smoothed out in the calm, majestic presence of the Prince of Peace. Mr. Joyce forgot that the long columns in the great ledgers were waiting for his skilful hand at the office, and his proud, impatient head drooped instinctively, as for a blessing.

Mrs. Joyce, with little Fred beside her, forgot there