

INSTALLMENT 7

THE STORY SO FAR: Dusty King and Lew Gordon had built up a Dusty King and Lew Gordon had built up a vast string of ranches which stretched from Texas to Montana. King was killed by his powerful and unscrupulous competitor. Ben Thorpe. Bill Roper, King's adopted son, undertook to break Thorpe's power. His first step was to start a catle war in Texas. He made this decision against the opposi-tion of Lew Gordon and the tearful pleading of his sweetheart. Jody Gordon. With the all of Dry Camp Pierce and other outlaw gummen. Roper conducted raid after raid upon Thorpe's herds. Cleve Tanner, man-ager of Thorpe's Texas holdings, seemed helpless to stop him. In spite of his dar-ing plans, Roper's resources had dwindled dangerously low by the time winter came. dangerously low by the time winter came And Thorpe seemed not to feel the losses

CHAPTER X

The winter dragged out slowly. Roper's plans, bold as they were, had been well laid. He had perceived from the first that success or failure depended upon whether or anot be could make his war with Tanner self sustaining. To gnaw away at the Tanner herds was one thing; to turn their captures into each man allowed their captures into cash was altogether another.

Roper had hoped that he could ini-tiate his own drives to the north, but he had found this out of the question. On the other hand, the trail drivers had found themselves so vulnerable that none of them wanted to buy cattle of questiona-hie guestion. ble ownership.

The Thorpe-Tanner organization The Thorpe-Tanner organization did not have this problem; they took what they wanted and drove what they wanted, by means of their own trail outfits. But Roper could now only dispose of cattle for the trail through ranchers known to be scrupulous and established men. This was the strategic purpose be-hind Roper's rehabilitation of the

This was the strategic purpose be-hind Roper's rehabilitation of the eleven outfits which Tanner had orig-inally seized, and which Roper had now put back into the hands of their proper owners. These re-established ranchers had not only the sympathy but the respect of everyone who knew anything about Texas cattle. Through these men Roper now had a safe and sure outlet for the cattle a sate and sure outlet for the cattle recovered by Dry Camp's experts, while the gunfighters under such men as Nate Liggett, Tex Daniels, and Hat Crick Tommy supplied a much needed protection until they could get on their feet.

But this method, promising as it was, was slow. Of necessity the men whom Roper backed were cowmen without assets other than their disputed claim to their ground.

Sometimes by mortgage loans, but principally by silent partnerships, Roper had now obtained interests in nearly a dozen outfits. They should have been thriving outfits. But Roper found his money drain-ing away with unforeseen swiftness, ing away with unforestent switches, without hope of any financial re-turn until the trail should open in the spring. Only the Mexican bor-der operations, which depended upon Lee Harnish, continued to show a thin trickle of income through the winter months. As spring ap-proached, Roper found himself near the end of his string. Early in February, Shoshone Wilce came south seeking Bill Rop-er, and found him at the Pot Hook ranch.

ranch.

out anything?" Roper 'Find asked.

sked. Shoshone Wilce rubbed his badly shaved chin with horny fingers. "I don't know as you're going to like this so very good, Bill."

"Let's have the bad news first-I eat it up

"God knows there's enough of it; there ain't any other kind to be had. What do you want to know had. first?"

"How's Thorpe making out up above?

W.N.U. Release

tle in this country than the world has any use for. I don't think you can bother any man any more, just by fooling with his cattle." "Never mind what you think. Let's have what you know."

"I nosed around and tried to find out what promises Tanner's been making for cattle on spring deliv-eries. I didn't learn everything. No-body learns everything. But I got enough to total up." Shashong Wilco, hesitated

Shoshone Wilce hesitated, and didn't say any more until he had got a cigarette rolled. In the mid-dle of rolling his cigarette he went into a coughing fit, and spilled the tobacco, so that he had to start over again again

'Bill," he said at last, "Cieve Tanner's going to drive more cattle this year than he's ever drove be-fore. In just one bunch alone he aims to deliver fifteen thousand head

on the banks of the Red!" "He's crazy!" Roper shouted. "He can't do it—it's impossible!"

"Well—he thinks he can. He knows his cattle counts better than me. But—I've been all up and down this country, and I don't see but what he can."

"Well, anyway," Roper said, "the border gangs are going good. We'll go on with it, and keep going on . .." "Bill," Shoshone said, "how long can you go on, the way it's costing you now?"

"Not much farther, I guess." "You going to have to quit?"

Roper shook his head. "I'll never quit now, Shoshone; I can't quit.



Harnish took to the brush and the hills.

While I've got one rider left with me, or no riders, I'll still be work-ing on Cleve Tanner. But I think we're going to beat him, Wilce. Aft-er all, the border gangs-we can count on them."

Roper continued to count on his border gangs for two weeks more. Then, in the middle of February, he learned that Lee Harnish was through.

The first word of difficulty came when Dave Shannon pushed a little bunch of seven hundred head through the river at Mudcat Turn, and found no vaqueros waiting on the other side. Shannon waited three days before he was forced to turn the cattle free and ride.

The complete news of what had happened never really came. What Roper learned came in bit by bit, by way of random riders who had talked with a vaquero here, another there.

Lee Harnish had been pressing outh with a herd of twelve hundred head. He was two days into Mex-ico, and supposed that he was clear; head. he had never had much trouble, once he was well below the line. But now, one moonless night, a band reported as of at least sixty men struck from no place, scattering the herd, and blazing down on Harnish's riders almost before they could take to the saddle. There had been a sharp running fight as Harnish and his half-dozen boys took to the brush and the hills. Unsatisfied with sei-zure of the herd, the unknown band had spent three days trying to hunt down Harnish's riders. Lee Harnish Limself, wounded in the first skirmish, had had a hard time getting clear; it was not known whether or not all of his riders were elsewhere accounted for.

hes done, this Tanner has put some hes done, this fanner has put some bunches of Mex renegades up to landing on us, they work with the Yakis, and his Indian scouts have spotted where we make our cross-ings. Seems like theres anyway a dozen bands of them havent got any-thing ales to do but her matching thing else to do but lay watching those crossings, and wait us out. "About half of them is carrying

new American guns and plenty am-munition. They got our hide nailed to the fence all right and we are threach " through."

It was a long time before Roper saw Lee Harnish's statements off-hand; but when he had conferred with Dave Shannon, and others of the borde: men in whom he be-lieved, he was forced to accede that the border-running phase of the at-tack on Tanner was done.

As February drew to a close, the big herds were once more being thrown together for the trail. It was deep into March when Tex

Long quit. "Look," Tex Long said, "look." He did not talk easily; whatever he said was matter-of-fact, even now. "I got to pull out of this game."

Bill Roper looked at fiim, without expression. "All right. How much you figure I owe you?"

Tex smiled. "Nothing." A very rare flush of anger came into Bill Roper's face. "Tex, what's the matter with you?"

the matter with you?" Tex Long made a quick, futile gesture with his hands. "We used to be able to jump down on them. We can't do that now. The Bert Johnson place is studded with ri-fles until a man can't take a step. Every place you'll find out it's the same. There isn't going to be any-thing more we can do. We went same. There isn't going to be any-thing more we can do. We went good for a while. But they got or-ganized, now. We're through." Tex Long was only one of Bill Burner's nicked gunfishters, but he

Roper's picked gunfighters, but he was one of the best. As March drew on, Roper lost four more.

Into the Big Bend, into the valley of the Nucces, Cleve Tanner had flooded such a power of gunfighters as Bill Roper would not have be-lieved. He had supposed that he could outplace and outsmart Tanner's warrior outfits. But now his raiding forces met everywhere a stubborn resistance.

Roper had discounted the quit of Tex Long; but now other news was coming in. The Graham outfit-the first of all those that the Roper men had taken—was again in the hoper then had taken—was again in the hands of Cleve Tanner; and Nate Liggett, assigned to protect Graham, had headed for the tall without even a report. Hat Crick Tommy was three weeks missing. The Davis outfit, left under his protection, had gone left under his protection, had gone the way of all loose outfits, and Tan-

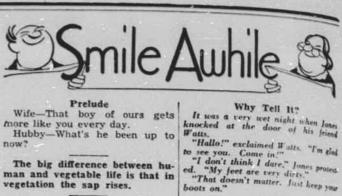
ner's cowboys rode the range. Dry Camp Pierce was almost the last to come in-of those who came in at all.

Pierce rode into the Pot Hook Camp early in April. He was the same, small wiry man he always had been—his eyes watery, his jaws poorly shaven.

"Bill, I can't carry these camps no more. God knows we strung with you while we could. We've et beef, beef, beef without salt or flour, we've et bobcat meat. But Bill, there's no lead in our guns, and there's no patches in our guns, and there's no patches in our pants, and it's time I got to let the boys go, to make out any way they can."

go, to make out any way they can." Bill Roper looked older than Dusty King had ever looked; his face was like granite, with hard lines cut into it by the weather. "Okay," he said. "I understand how you feel, Dry Camp." "Look you here," Dry Camp said. "I've strung with you when I wouldn't have strung with any other man, let alone an upstart kid. I'll man, let alone an upstart kid. I'll say this for you-you've made a game fight. But kid, take my word for it—they're too big, and they're too strong." strong too

"You think so?" Bill Roper said. "I know so. I don't know what ou had, made men like Lee Harnish and Dave Shannon and Nate Liggett throw in with you, but they did-the damnedest wild bunch Texas ever seen. Half the renegades of the Long Trail, and your part of King-Gordon, has gone into beating Cleve Tanner. And where are we now?'



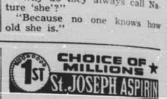
The big difference between human and vegetable life is that in vegetation the sap rises.

> No Sale Lawyer-That'll be \$10, please. Client-What for? "My advice!" "But I'm not taking it."

Standard Time Zones

Officials of the large railroads the United States met in 1883 in the United states met in 1005 to discover some method of estab-lishing a time-system that could be universally adopted by all American railroads. Previously, all roads had used different sys tems.

The railroad men adopted a sys-tem based on the idea that 24 standard meridians should be established 15 degrees apart in londivide, starting from the meridian of Greenwich, England, and ex-tending around the globe. An in-ternational conference on stand-ard time, meeting in Washington in 1804, made the same recom-mendation to the countries recommendation to the countries repre-sented. Since that time, the four time zones, Eastern, Central, time zones, Eastern, Central, Mountain and Pacific, have been used in this country.



Happiness to Others

Her Secret

"Why do they always call Na-

Happiness is watching others drink from springs which we have caused to rise in the desert. B. II. Metson.

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saw him in Dodge City; he was throwing money around with a You know shovel in each hand. what I think? I think he can go away and forget Tanner, and write everything he has in Texas right off the books, and never know the difference!"

Roper locked his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling. Sometimes it seemed to him that trying to break Tanner was like try-ing to empty the Rio Grande with a hand dipper. The apparently un-bounded resources of Ben Thorpe in the middle country and in the north, out of reach of the south Texas war, made up a vast reservoir which Tanner could draw on without limit.

'How is Tanner himself making out?'

"Bill, I've been all up and down the north and east part of Texas; and I can't see where we've ac-complished a damned thing."

"You don't know what you're talk-ing about!" "You know what I think?" Wilce persisted. "I think there's more cat-

After an elapse of several weeks, an Indian-faced vaquero came hunting Bill Roper; he carried a written message from Lee Harnish:

"This thing is finished up. Don't let anybody tell you it was Cleve Tanners men busted into us. What Well?"

"We aren't any place! Kid, I tell you we're beat, and we're beat!"

April melted into May, and Roper had nothing to fight with any more. Those units of his wild bunch that had not quit had not been heard from at all; he knew already that the ones who had completely failed.

(TO BE CONTINUED)