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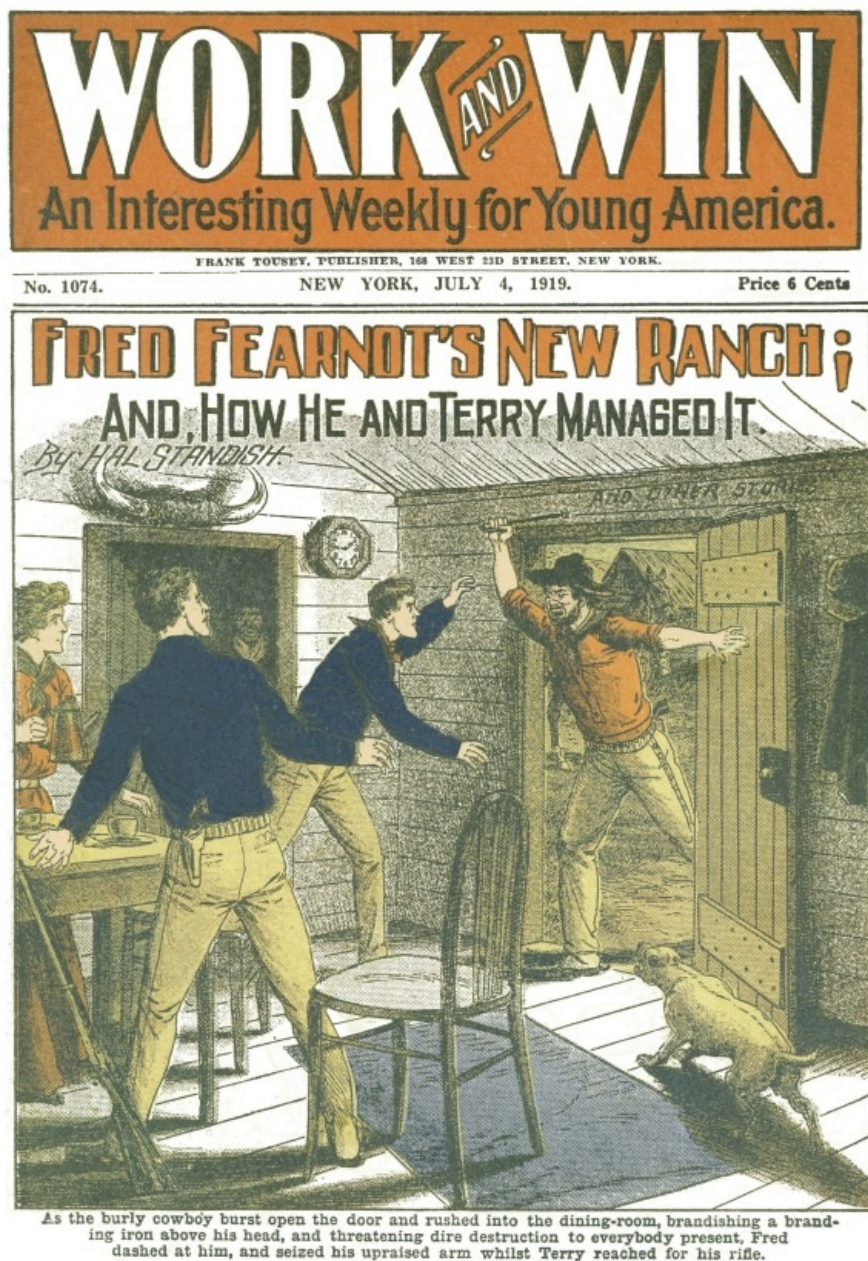
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WORK AND WIN

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FRED FEARNOT'S NEW RANCH -AND- HOW HE AND TERRY MANAGED IT

By HAL STANDISH

CHAPTER I.

FEARNOT AND OLCOTT AT FREEDONIA.

Fearnot and Olcott remained in Wall Street after the great excitement occasioned, by Fred's sudden change of front, when he turned from a bull to a bear in the market, quietly waiting for another chance to make a deal.

All the brokers in the Street had nothing else to talk about for the time being but that singular event, and it became well known that the brokers who had been attempting to crush him the second time narrowly escaped being themselves completely ruined.

Although Fred and Terry didn't reap the benefit of the change as much as they expected, they made a neat little sum, and Broker Bellamy, who had been Fred's most persistent enemy, was so badly crippled that many brokers thought he was completely ruined.

His two nephews, thinking that Fred had been too harsh with their uncle, hired a couple of thugs to give him a good beating, but the news of their intention having reached Fred's ears, Terry kept inside the typewriter's room an hour after the close of business for some time.

One afternoon the thugs entered the room and the leader fell into Fred's terrible grip, and he squeezed his ribs so fiercely that several of them were broken. The wounded slugger's pal was roundly thrashed, too, by Terry, who couldn't resist the temptation to take a hand in it, but he was permitted to take his friend out to the hospital.

The building was so nearly deserted at the time that the news did not get out.

The two young nephews of Broker Bellamy on learning of the failure of their hired assassins, immediately sailed from New York for parts unknown, and all Wall Street became interested in the question of what had become of them, where they had gone and why they had left the city between sunset and sunrise.

Fred and Terry believed that they knew just why they had gone away, but, of course, had no idea where they had gone.

Broker Bellamy, who was very fond of his two stalwart nephews, intimated that he believed that Fred and Terry knew what had become of them, and, from that, the gossips began saying that the old broker had charged Fred and Terry with making way with his two nephews. At first Fred and Terry laughed at it, and so did all Wall Street. Nobody believed it except their enemies, who were willing to believe anything to their discredit.

Terry finally called up Broker Bellamy and took him to task for starting such a report that they had had some hand in making way with his nephews, but the old man, of course, denied the charge, whereupon Terry told him of the hired sluggers who had attacked Fred in his office, and how their attack had proved an absolute failure.

One of the sluggers had died from being shot by a crook after making confession to one of the surgeons that he had been hired by the two Bellamy boys, and that therefore he ought to understand why his nephews had absconded from the city.

The old fellow was dumfounded, and it was probably true when he denied that he knew anything about the attack on Fearnot, and so he refused to make any retraction whatever.

Then Terry wrote an account of the whole incident and had it published in one of the big dailies. This was a shock to the entire city.

Terry obtained an affidavit from one of the surgeons who had treated the wounded man in the hospital and one also from the other thug who had witnessed and taken part in the attack corroborating the charge that Terry had made.

It came very near ruining the old broker, who already had many enemies in the Street, and it gradually forced him to retire.

After that Fred and Terry took part in several more little deals, some of which panned out pretty well, while others profited them little or nothing; but in the aggregate they had gathered in a pretty good sum during the season, and they decided that they were pretty well paid for their return to Wall Street; so they finally decided to go back down into Texas to look after their new ranch and try to add another thousand head of cattle to their herd.

They wrote Jack that they were going to return south, and as soon as Jack received their letter he promptly wired back to them to stay there until he joined them, as he intended to come up after his mother and to marry Katy Malone, who was still working in the office with Louise Crane.

"Great Scott, Terry!" said Fred. "Jack has finished his house by this time, and now he is in a hurry to get his mother and sweetheart down there with him."

"Well, I don't blame him, Fred. Katy is a sweet girl and dead in love with him, while his mother wants her along as a companion."

"Very true; but, Terry, I fear that he is making a mistake."

"Don't say anything about that, Fred," advised Terry, "for it would hurt both his and her feelings, and probably his mother's. I don't see how it is possible that his house can be finished ready for occupancy in such a short time."

"Neither do I, and I'm going to wire to him and ask him if the house is finished, and if it isn't I'll just advise him to postpone his trip North until it is." So he wired to Crabtree, and the dispatch was sent down the road by the operator to him.

Jack promptly answered the question by saying that the house was not yet finished, and would not be for several months yet, but that his mother and Katy could find comfortable quarters in one of the other houses.

Fred immediately wired back:

"Take my advice, Jack, and wait until the house is finished and furnished."

The next morning he received a reply from Jack, saying:

"All right, sir, I'll wait."

"Terry, that boy is no fool," Fred remarked, as he showed him the dispatch.

"Now, Terry," said Fred, "let's see if we can't persuade Evelyn and Mary to go back with us down there. We can keep them at the hotel in Crabtree, supply them with a carriage and a pair of horses, and you know it is not absolutely necessary for us to live out on the ranch entirely yet. Then, too, we are well enough supplied with money now to entertain them in good style, as well as to add another thousand head of cattle to our herd."

"Fred, that would suit you all right, for I have no doubt but that Evelyn would be glad to go, but I am afraid that Mrs. Hamilton will refuse to give her consent to Mary's going out there, and I am sure, too, that she will never consent to our marriage if I intend to bring her down here to live. She seems to have a holy horror of Texas; for that state has the name, you know, all over this part of the country as being a place for which all law-breakers leave when the sheriff gets after them. We had that idea, too, until we stayed down there among them for a few months; but there are no better people in the world, on an average, than we have found the citizens of Texas to be."

"Well, Terry, let's take a run up to Fredonia and have a talk with the girls and their mothers. We may be able to persuade Mrs. Hamilton to our way of thinking." So a few days later they took the train up to Fredonia, without having notified the girls of their intention of doing so.

It so happened that on that very day Evelyn and Mary took a ride over on Main street, and when they had finished their little shopping Evelyn suggested that they drive up to the depot and see the train pass.

They did so, and were never more surprised in their lives than when they saw Fred and Terry emerge from the cars.

"Oh, Mary!" exclaimed Evelyn, "there are Fred and brother!"

"Where? Where?" Mary questioned.

"Why, don't you see them coming there with their valises in their hands?" and the two girls

threw their arms around each other's necks and kissed each other in their great joy at seeing their sweethearts.

Fred and Terry saw the carriage and at once left the station platform and started toward it.

Evelyn sprang out of the carriage, ran to Terry, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him only as a loving sister can.

Fred dropped his valise, and, catching her in his arms, kissed her on both cheeks, while probably a score of spectators stood looking on; but then neither of them cared for that, for every man, woman and child in Fredonia knew of their engagement.

"Dear," said Fred, "how did you know that we were coming up?"

"Fred, I really can't say. Mary and I were down on Main street shopping. Suddenly the thought of you and brother came into my head and my heart suggested that we come up here, although both of us were ignorant that you boys were coming up on that train."

"Well, bless that dear heart," said Fred, as he assisted her into the carriage.

Of course, the Olcott and Hamilton families were greatly surprised.

Fred explained to Evelyn that he and Terry had succeeded in their deals down in Wall Street and had almost recovered from their losses caused by failure of the Texas bank, and that they were thinking of going back down to Texas to look after their new ranch and to try to add another thousand head of cattle to their herd.

"And you came up to tell us good-by, eh?"

"Well, we came up to see you girls, but about that I'll tell you later."

Neither of the boys went over into town during that day. They were satisfied to remain with their sweethearts, and their sweethearts were more than pleased to have them do so. Both the girls were highly pleased with the report they made as to their financial success in Wall Street.

"Fred," said Evelyn, "why not defer your return to Texas until cold weather, when I would be glad to go down with you and brother and spend the winter there, for I enjoyed myself splendidly last winter. The people were kind and sociable."

"Yes, indeed, we have found them so. When we left there, as I told you when we first came up, we were loaded down with loving messages for you from the best society people there at Crabtree, but I never saw Wall Street so dull in my life. I've had my revenge over the worst enemy I ever had there; but you know all about that, for you were down at the office at the time I changed front and got the best of Broker Bellamy and his syndicate."

"Yes, and I actually felt sorry for the old rascal. I don't enjoy other people's distress, Fred."

"No I know that; but I tell you that sometimes revenge is sweet. We didn't make as much out of that deal as we expected to, but still we have no right to complain. We have not only saved ourselves from financial embarrassment, but have money enough left to add another thousand head of cattle to the ranch and to build any kind of a house that would suit you."

"Suit me!" said she. "Are you expecting to make that your future home, Fred?"

"I'll leave that with you, dear. If you insist upon it we can live elsewhere and do as we did on the Colorado ranch, leaving faithful men to manage it for us."

"Fred, I could live contentedly anywhere in the world where you are satisfied and can make money.

"Mrs. Hamilton, however," she continued, "is horrified at the idea of Mary living so far from her. She has a great fear of the climate of Texas, and she thinks the people, too, down there are nearly half savages."

"Well, can't you tell her better than that?"

"I have told her all about how I found the people down there at Crabtree, but she says I was there at a hotel where only people of refinement live, and that I know nothing about the people out in the country. I laughed at her and asked her if she knew anything about them herself, and she retorted that everybody who read newspapers knew what sort of people lived down there."

"Well, dear, Terry and I have come up to see if we could persuade you and Mary to go down there with us and spend the fall and winter."

"Fred, I am perfectly willing to go anywhere that brother goes along with us, and I will do my best to get Mrs. Hamilton's consent for Mary to go, for she has never been down in that section of the country."

"Well, you go, anyhow," suggested Fred. "I want you to see the new ranch. I wouldn't think of making a home at the ranch we looked at when we went down to Crabtree. The one that we afterwards bought as an investment is the one I mean. I believe that we can, eventually, build up a little place of resort about that big, bold mineral spring just a mile from the railroad track, and I intend to have the water analyzed. The physicians claim down there that it has been partially analyzed and is said to be the finest water in the South, but I am going to send a bottle of the water to a chemist in New York or Philadelphia who has an established reputation and have him analyze it.

"I do hope, though," he added, "that you will plead with Mrs. Hamilton for her consent to let Mary go down and see the country."

That evening the two boys spent with their sweethearts at their respective homes.

Terry then told Mary what he wanted her to do, saying that Evelyn was going down with him and Fred to see their Texas ranch, and he wanted her to go, too.

"Mary," said he, "it is the richest ranch I ever saw in my life. We thought the one in Colorado was a grand one, and so it was, but the grass there was never so abundant or so nutritious as at our new ranch. It grows much taller, keeps fresh and green longer, and the soil itself is several degrees richer than the Colorado ranch. You never so many quail in your life as you can see there every day in the week all the year round. There are prairie chickens, and there are ten jack-rabbits there to one in Colorado."

"But, Terry, last winter you wrote me about some bad Mexican and American cowboys who had made trouble for you."

"Yes, but didn't we have the same trouble out in Colorado? Didn't I point out to you several times in Colorado the graves of horse thieves and cattle thieves whom our cowboys had shot to prevent them from plundering our ranch? Are not murders committed right here in New York City often, and don't you read of them in the papers? Why, there is no place in the country where bad men don't live, and bad women, too, for that matter; and by this time those cowboys have found out that Fred and I, as well as Jack, are deadshots and not afraid to pull a trigger on a bad character, so you can't say anything against that locality any more than you can any other in the West."

"Terry, is Evelyn going back with you?" she asked.

"Yes she has said that she would, but she wants you to go, too."

"Terry, I'm afraid that mother will never consent."

"By George, Mary, she must consent," said Terry. "I'm not going to let her destroy my happiness."

"Well, Terry, you will have to talk with her yourself."

"That's just what Fred and I came up to do, dear. Of course, we couldn't take you against her consent until after you and I are married, and if she won't consent to your accompanying Evelyn down there, why I'll hurry back as soon as I can get the home ready for you, marry you and away we'll go to just where we darn please!"

The next day Fred and Terry made a combined attack on Mrs. Hamilton trying to gain her consent for Mary to go down and spend the fall and winter in Texas with Evelyn, but she was firm in her refusal, saying that Mary had spent "nearly half her time for several years away from home, and that she was opposed to her going so far south, anyway."

Both Fred and Terry had to finally give it up in despair. Evelyn said that she would go down with them, as she had never enjoyed herself more, even up at New Era, than she had at Crabtree.

She said, too, that she had never met up with more refined people than she had there. Mary, of course, cried herself sick and begged piteously for permission to accompany Evelyn. Mrs. Hamilton, though, put up all sorts of excuses. When she mentioned the matter of expense Evelyn said that Mary could go as her guest, and that she need not spend one nickel for anything.

"Besides, mother," pleaded Mary, "I have money of my own, you know, and surely, as I am of age, I should be permitted to spend some of it just as I please."

CHAPTER II.

TERRY OLCOTT ON DECK.

Finding all their pleadings with Mrs. Hamilton in vain, Fred and Terry began making preparations for the long trip down to Texas, accompanied only by Evelyn.

While regretting to see her leave, her mother never objected to her going anywhere with her brother; so, after a few days' preparations, they were all ready to start.

Mary accompanied them down to New York City, where she was to spend a week with Mrs. Middleton.

They finally decided to take a steamer from New York to New Orleans, and quite a party of friends accompanied them down to the wharf. The very best staterooms in the steamer had been reserved for them. Evelyn's cabin was a bank of flowers, which loving friends and admirers had sent down for her.

Evelyn was a pretty good sailor, and had once crossed the Atlantic without the least bit of seasickness. Among the passengers was a family of New Orleans people, a father and mother and two beautiful daughters. The father was a rich New Orleans merchant whom Fred and Terry knew well by reputation, and, of course, the merchant and his family knew them in the same way Evelyn made their acquaintance before the vessel had actually passed through the Narrows. The two sisters fell in love with her at once. The elder sister was about twenty years of age and of exquisite Creole beauty. She was very much surprised when she found out that Evelyn could speak French as fluently as she could.

"Oh," said Evelyn, "I spent a most agreeable time in Paris once. My brother and Mr. Fearnot are both quite good linguists, Mr. Fearnot particularly. He can learn a foreign language more easily and rapidly than any one I ever knew. Brother can learn it easily, too; but not as much so as Mr. Fearnot."

Just as the steamer was passing out of the Narrows both Fred and Terry came up to where Evelyn was talking with the two French girls, and she introduced them to the boys.

Both the New Orleans girls looked at them as though somewhat surprised. "Why, Mr. Fearnot," said one of them, "I've heard a great deal about you, but you are much younger than I expected to find you."

"Oh, I'm a kid yet," he laughed, and Terry proceeded to amuse them with some funny stories.

The elder of the two Creoles remarked that she was very fond of the sea.

"Do you ever get seasick?" Terry asked.

"No; do you?"

"Yes, every time I get out on blue water I have to pay tribute to old King Neptune. I've done my best to make friends with him, but I always fail. He will have his joke with me."

"Ladies," remarked Fred, "if you want something to laugh at until you reach New Orleans just manage to see Olcott when he is seasick."

"Why, what is funny about it?"

"I can't tell you. He makes funny remarks and queer noises."

Evelyn laughed and said:

"Yes, he expresses opinions about old Father Neptune that I think he really ought to be ashamed of."

"Don't you get seasick?"

"Not unless the water is rough and the waves come rolling high, and then I have to retire to my stateroom for at least twenty-four hours; then I'm all right for the rest of the voyage, even if it extends all around the world."

As they were rounding Sandy Hook a great many of the passengers sought the seclusion of their staterooms and cabins, for the waves were rolling very actively.

Evelyn and the two Creole girls, whose name was Elon, remained on deck longer than any of the lady passengers on board.

By and by Evelyn and the younger of the two Elon sisters retired to their rooms.

The elder one laughed and said to Fred:

"Mr. Fearnot, we two seem to be on quite good terms with the old man of the sea."

"Yes," returned Fred. "When I made up my mind to go South by water I began to make preparations to remain on good terms with Father Neptune."

"Why, how in the world did you manage to do that?"

"Why, don't you know a remedy for seasickness, or a palliative, at least?"

"Why, no, indeed. What is it? I have never heard of any except lemons."

"Well, lemons are very good, and will be effective if you tackle them twenty-four hours or more before beginning the voyage. I have a bottle of acid phosphate in my room, and a teaspoonful in half a glass of water soon equips one in such a manner that he can resist the effects of the motion of the ship."

"Oh, my! will you give me a drink of it? I'm not at all seasick, but if the water gets any rougher I will be."

"Certainly," and Fred went to his room and soon returned with a glass with about two teaspoonfuls of acid phosphate in it. He went to the water cooler, filled the glass with cold water and presented it to the young lady.

"Drink about half of it," said he, "and in twenty or thirty minutes drink the other half."

She took the glass, tipped it up and drained every drop of its contents.

"By George," said he, "you took a good dose."

"Oh, I'm used to drinking phosphates; but never heard of it as an antidote for seasickness before. Have you had a drink of it?"

"Oh, yes; I've had two drinks since I left the wharf."

He took the glass to his room, and when he came out he tendered his arms to the girl and went promenading up and down the deck.

Her father went to her and asked her if she felt any seasickness.

"No, father," said she, "not the least bit. This gentleman is Mr. Fearnot, the famous athlete."

"Well, well, well! I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Fearnot. I heard of you several times when you were in New Orleans. What's become of your friend Olcott?"

"Oh, he's on board, and so is his sister Evelyn."

"Well, I'd like to meet him and his sister," said the old gentleman.

"Father," said his daughter, "she is just the sweetest and prettiest girl you ever saw in your life. I met her when we first came on board, but as the sea was a little too rough for her she had to retire to her room, and I hardly think that we will have the pleasure of seeing her again before tomorrow. Mr. Olcott, her brother, Mr. Fearnot tells me, is an awful victim to seasickness, and that he says and does funny things while old Neptune has a grip on him."

Then she suddenly asked her father how her mother was.

"Oh, she is in her room actually groaning and making believe that she is going to die."

"Oh, she does that every time she sails," and the girl laughed merrily.

Mr. Elon remained with her and Fred for at least a half hour. Then he drew a package of cigars from his pocket said tendered one to Fred.

"Thank you, sir; but I never smoke."

"Well you will excuse me, then, if I indulge."

"Certainly, sir; certainly." So he retired to the further side of the deck and lit a cigar by using a match made in Sweden which the fiercest wind cannot extinguish.

Then he began puffing furiously.

The girl squeezed Fred's arm and said:

"Just watch him. You'll see him slipping back to his room pretty soon. He's no sailor."

"Well," said Fred, "you seem to be a pretty good mariner."

"Yes; if you have any suspicions that I will retreat, just stick to me."

"All right, I'll keep an eye on you, for you are beautiful to look at, if you will pardon the liberty of expression."

"Mr. Fearnot, did you ever see a girl who didn't like such expressions?"

"Yes, I saw one once when she was struggling with an attack of mal de mer, and she had to yield to its effect in the presence of all the crowd, for there was no place for retreat for her. We were returning from Coney Island. The young man who was acting as her escort thought that he would compliment her by mentioning that she was the most beautiful girl on the ship. She thought it was spoken sarcastically, for she couldn't conceive how a seasick girl could be

beautiful, and then just at that time she was disgorging the dinner which she had eaten an hour or two before, so she turned on him and gave him a pretty sharp rebuke."

Miss Elon laughed heartily at the story, and said:

"Well, I don't blame her, for a girl thinks at such a time as that she looks as ugly as she feels, even if she don't. Now, Mr. Fearnot," she continued, "will you please go back and bring me another dose of that acid phosphate?"

"Certainly, certainly!" and he hurried back to his cabin and returned with the glass with the phosphate in it. Filling the glass with water, he presented it to her and suggested that she take only half the dose.

"All or nothing," she laughed, and swallowed the contents of the glass.

She returned the glass to Fred with thanks, and he took it back to his cabin and took a dose himself.

To his astonishment the girl kept her feet admirably, and even when supper was announced she looked up at him and said:

"Mr. Fearnot, father and mother and sister have all retired. Will you take me down to supper?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," he replied, with a smile. "You are a strong, brave girl, and you must pardon me if I give utterance to my admiration."

"Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Fearnot," and, taking his arm, she accompanied him down into the dining-room, where she was the only lady passenger present.

She ate rather a light supper, and so did Fred. The meal over, they went back up on deck, for all people when seasick want to be out in the fresh air, and if the wind blows strong and cold they are all the better for it.

Of course, the air wasn't cold at that season of the year, but the wind blew fresh and strong from over the sea.

They walked about on the deck until ten o'clock, and then she said:

"Mr. Fearnot, you will excuse me if I retire."

"All right," said he, "but tell me, do you feel the least bit seasick?"

"No, indeed. I did expect to be, but that acid phosphate seemed to have been the very thing for me, and I thank you heartily for suggesting it to me."

"Perhaps you had better take another dose before retiring. You may need some, too, through the night; so you may take the bottle to the cabin with you," and he got it and placed it in her hand.

The next morning the passengers came straggling into the breakfast-room, some looking very pale and wearied; but the elder Miss Elon came tripping down the stairs like a sparrow.

While she and Fred were at the table her sister and Evelyn came in together.

Fred sprang up to accompany them to seats.

"How are you feeling, dear?" Fred inquired.

"Fred, I confess I haven't gotten over old Neptune's slap yet. Did he worry you any?"

"Not the least," and then he told her about Miss Elon's sister.

The younger Miss Elon was sitting alongside of Evelyn and remarked:

"Oh, Josephine never gets seasick."

"So I found out last night," replied Fred, "for we promenaded the deck until ten o'clock. She drank pretty freely of acid phosphate, and that removed the feeling entirely."

"Oh, my, Fred! Why didn't you offer me some of it?"

"I did for two days before we came aboard, but you refused to take it."

"Yes, but I didn't need it then."

"Well, that is the time when you should have taken it. I see you are looking a little pale yet, and it isn't too late to brace up with a dose of it now, but Miss Josephine has the bottle in her cabin."

"Yes," said her sister; "she gave me a dose of it, too, and, Mr. Fearnot, I wish you could have heard the many kind things she said about you. It's a wonder your ears didn't tingle."

"Well, well, well! Now I know why my ears did tingle so last night. I am glad I know what caused it."

Evelyn laughed with Miss Elon and remarked:

"He is good at that sort of thing."

The breakfast set the girls all right, and they went up on deck and promenaded until many other ladies appeared, some of them still showing the effects of seasickness, but by noon they were all out, for the sea was by no means very rough, and the further south the ship plowed the more quiet the waters became.

Terry didn't eat any breakfast that morning at all, unless sucking two or three whole lemons might be called by that name.

He came out on deck about ten o'clock, still entertaining very bad opinions of old Father Neptune.

He could have abused the old fellow better without indulging in profanity than any man living, but along in the middle of the afternoon he recovered entirely.

He took charge of Grace Elon, the younger of the two Elon sisters, and kept her laughing heartily as they walked to and fro upon the deck.

When they struck Cape Hatteras, where the water is always rough, it was quite late in the night, and some of the passengers felt the effect of it, which spoiled the pleasure of the evening.

The water is nearly always rough at that point on the Atlantic coast.

The next morning, though, the bosom of the ocean seemed to be like a vast mirror, so smooth was it. Seagulls were flying around, following the ship to pick up such bits of food as the cooks and waiters cast overboard. Some four or five gentlemen got out on the stern deck and with revolvers were shooting at the birds.

Nearly a dozen shots were fired without a single seagull being hit.

All sailors object to passengers shooting at Mother Carey's chickens, as they call the seagull, but the average passenger has no such superstition.

"It's a pity," said Josie Elon, "to kill such beautiful birds. How white and clean they seem to be, and what beautiful white wings they have. Every feather seems to have been made of snow."

"They are very hard to hit," remarked Terry, "and only a good marksman can hit one of them on the wing."

"Mr. Olcott, I have read in the papers about you and Mr. Fearnot being the best marksmen in the country. Couldn't you kill one of them?"

"Yes, easily, and if you want a wing to place in your hat I will procure it for you."

"I would like to have one so that I could examine the feathers."

"Wait, then, until I can get my revolver and I'll bring one down on deck here so that you can examine it to your satisfaction." So he went to his room and soon returned with his revolver.

"Now, let's get out on the middle of the deck and wait until one of the gulls flies over us, then he will drop down on the deck and he can be your prize."

He waited for about fifteen minutes before a gull flew directly overhead, and then he quickly raised his revolver and fired. The bullet actually cut the bird's head off and it fell fluttering to the deck.

Of course, the marksmanship created quite a sensation among the passengers every one of whom exclaimed that it was an accident, and that the gentleman might fire one hundred times again without bringing down another bird, but not one of them thought to ask the name of the gentleman who had fired the shot, for the ladies gathered around to examine the beautiful plumage of the gull.

There were two or three ladies on board who had wing feathers of the same kind in their hats, and some of them insisted on comparing the wings of the dead gull with some found on the hats of the ladies.

Naturally a dispute arose among them as to whether or not those on the hat were the same kind as those of the dead bird. Some, of course, were larger than others.

Terry suggested that he bring down another one that the comparison might be made as to the

size and exact color to settle the question as to whether they were all of the same kind.

"See here, my friend," said one of the gentlemen on the deck, "I'll lay fifty dollars down here which says that you can't bring down another one in fifty shots."

"What!" Terry exclaimed, "do you mean to say that I can't bring down another with fifty shots?"

"That's just what I do, sir."

"Well, you are a very foolish man, if you will excuse the expression."

"Oh, I'll excuse that," said the man, "but I mean just what I say. If you had a shotgun I wouldn't make the bet, but with your revolver you couldn't hit another bird on the wing in fifty shots, and if you want to cover the bet I'll double it with pleasure."

"Do you mind my asking you another question?" Terry inquired.

"No; ask as many as you please."

"Well, I would like to know how much money you have with you."

"Oh, I've got enough to pay all I lose betting on your marksmanship. If you want to make the bet a hundred, or two hundred, or five hundred, show your money and I'll cover it."

"My friend, I really don't want your money, but I will make it five hundred dollars just to show you how foolish you are to make a bet of that kind with a stranger. Probably if you knew me you wouldn't make such an offer."

"Never mind who you are, I'm betting on the marksmanship," and the fellow drew a big roll of money from his pocket and began to count it to the amount of five hundred dollars.

"All right," and Terry proceeded to count out five hundred dollars which he asked the young lady from New Orleans to hold for him, saying that she would be his stake holder.

"Oh, my! What if I run away with it?"

"Oh, I'll take the chances of it," laughed Terry.

CHAPTER III.

HOW FRED, TERRY AND EVELYN RETURNED TO TEXAS.

The other passenger also handed his roll of bills to Miss Elon, and, looking at Terry, said:

"Now, go ahead."

"Wait a few moments," said Terry, "until one flies over the deck, so that he will drop down in order that the ladies may examine his wings."

"All right; take your time," and, while he was standing around waiting he asked the young lady who was holding the money who the young man was.

"Why, he is Mr. Olcott. Haven't you heard of him?"

"No, I never did. At least not that I can remember."

The young lady seemed to be quite surprised, and asked him if he had ever heard of Fred Fearnot.

"Oh, yes, I've heard of him in the public press many a time."

"Well, Mr. Olcott is Mr. Fearnot's partner, and they are both said to be the best shots in the United States."

The fellow looked straight at Terry as if trying to size him up. He hadn't really ever heard of Olcott to his recollection but shooting a gull on the wing with a revolver was such an extraordinary feat that he was willing to take the chances. He had seen him bring down one gull and like the majority of men who take chances, decided that it was impossible for it to be done very often.

By and by he looked up and saw a gull sailing over the deck and sung out:

"There's a good shot. Try him."

Terry raised his gun and fired so quickly that none of the spectators thought that he had even taken aim. The bullet struck the gull squarely in the breast, and, of course, the bird came tumbling down right into the group of passengers.

Exclamations of surprise burst from nearly every man on the deck.

The loser didn't seem to care anything about his loss, so Fred and Terry sized him as a professional gambler.

"Would you like to try another shot?" Terry asked.

"Well, no; not at that price."

"Well, I'll give you odds of two to one."

"No, I've got enough," was the reply, and Terry laughed rather sarcastically.

"I'll give you odds of a hundred to one," Terry said.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed another passenger. "Will you give me such odds, mister?"

"Yes if this gentleman refuses."

"All right, I refuse," said the gentleman who had lost.

"Then I'll take it and put up a hundred dollars," said the second man.

"Well, that calls for ten thousand from me," replied Terry, and again he waited for a good shot.

Finally another gull came flying over, about twice as high as the first two.

Terry was going to wait for another chance, when the bettor angrily exclaimed that he must want a bird to alight on the muzzle of his revolver.

"Why, surely you don't expect to have me shoot at a bird that is really out of range, do you?"

"No, but that wasn't out of range."

"My friend, you don't know anything about distance on either land or water. That gull is at least a hundred yards above us," and nearly every man on the deck agreed with Terry, but the bettor became rather sarcastic and asked if he expected the bird to knock his hat off with one of its wings.

"Here comes another one," sung out somebody, and, looking up, they saw another gull about the same height from the deck. The bettor remarked:

"Oh, he's too high."

Everybody recognized the sneer in his tone. Terry, however, raised his revolver and fired, and the gull came fluttering, down with one of its wings actually cut off.

The bettor's friends at once began sympathizing with him, but he looked at Terry and asked if he considered that a good shot.

"Yes, I consider that pretty good," said Terry. "I brought him down, and the bet was that I couldn't hit him. I consider it a good shot because he was up so high that he could scarcely have been brought down even with a shotgun."

Neither side had put up any money in that last bet, but the gambler insisted that it wasn't a fair shot, and that he thought Terry ought to make another trial.

"No, sir," said Terry, "not for ten thousand dollars. I never play with a man of your stripe."

"Oh, you don't like my stripe, eh?"

"No, I don't. All marksmen will agree that I brought the bird down fairly. I didn't agree to shoot his head off as I did the first one, but simply to bring him down. Now, if you will take the vote of the passengers and they don't agree with me ten to one it is no bet."

The gambler tried to argue about it rather than take the vote, but Terry walked away and refused to talk with him. He was a big six-footer, weighing pretty nearly two hundred pounds.

When Terry turned his back on him and refused to talk with him he placed his hand on Terry's shoulder and turned him square around so as to face him telling him that if he meant to insult him he would throw him overboard.

Quick as a flash Terry said:

"To be frank with you, sir, I do mean to insult you. I denounce you as a dishonorable man, who won't play fair if it costs you a few hundred dollars."

With that the man aimed a blow at Terry's face with his big fist, but Terry easily parried it

and gave him three or four blows in rapid succession on his chest in return, causing him to stagger back against another man, who kindly held him up.

"That's right," said Terry. "Hold him up," and in the next few seconds Terry put in three or four more blows on his solar plexus, and down he sank on the deck scarcely able to breathe.

Some friends of the man took him up and carried him into the main saloon, where others assisted him to his cabin. The captain heard of the trouble and came out on the deck to make inquiries as to whom was to blame.

He soon got the straight story of it, and at once went to the fellow's cabin and told him that if he made any more trouble on board his ship he would have him put in irons until they reached the end of the voyage.

Quite a number of gentlemen then asked Fearnot if his friend was a professional fighter.

"No," Fred replied. "He is a Wall Street broker, and is also my partner in a ranch down in Texas."

Both the Elon girls expressed their amazement at his fighting qualities.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Evelyn. "He hasn't been whipped since he was fifteen years old. I knew that that big fellow would be severely punished if he struck brother. Now, if he had struck Mr. Fearnot, he would have fared even worse; for Fred is probably one of the strongest men of his size in the United States, so far as physical abilities are concerned."

Of course, there was no more shooting that day. The ship's surgeon said that the man who had tackled Olcott would not be able to appear on deck that day.

That evening, as Evelyn and the elder Elon girl were standing out on the forward deck, gazing at the stars, Terry came up and joined them.

"Mr. Olcott," said the New Orleans beauty, "you are just the kind of a man that I have been looking for for three or four years. Please tell me how I can induce you to come courting."

"Too late," laughed Terry, "I'm already mortgaged."

"Oh, my! Just my luck."

"Don't despair," laughed Terry. "You have perhaps heard the old saying that there are just as many fish in the sea as were ever caught."

"Oh, yes. There are plenty of good men; but no more like you. I don't believe in fighting, but when I marry I want my husband to be able to whip any other man."

"All right," he laughed, "if you want me to lick a man for your husband just to please you I will do it if you will send for me."

"Oh, that wouldn't do. If my husband had to have another man to do his fighting for him, I would soon get so disgusted that I would sue for a divorce."

"Well, that shows that every man ought to learn how to defend himself. If you ever fall in love with a fellow and he wants you to marry him, insist upon his taking boxing lessons. But let me tell you the majority of boxing men are generally rough fighters, who like to get into trouble just to show their skill as pugilists. Avoid all such."

"Say, Olcott," a passenger asked Terry, "are you going to let Connolly euchre you out of the hundred dollars you won?"

"Oh, if he wants to keep it in the face of the passengers on board who heard the bet, he is welcome to it as far as I am concerned. He is no gentleman, and as such I dismiss him from my thoughts altogether. I've been up against such men before. It's a debt of honor, and can't be collected by law, and dishonorable men never pay such debts."

The big fellow remained in his cabin to the end of the voyage, not caring to come out where he would be likely to face Terry or some of his friends, who thought he was acting disgracefully. The fact is, he didn't have the half of one hundred dollars with him.

During the remainder of the voyage Fred, Terry and Evelyn, with the two Elon sisters, had splendid concerts every evening in the main saloon, to the great enjoyment of the other passengers.

The captain said that he had never heard such music, even when he had had an opera troupe on board and the New Orleans ladies requested all three of them to visit them at their residence.

They thanked them for their invitation, of course, but, stated that they would not spend more than twenty-four hours in the city, as they were anxious to reach Texas; and that they would be very busy all the rest of the season looking after their ranch.

Some of the ladies did not believe it possible that such refined young men could be ranchmen, so when the ship entered the mouth of the river all the passengers crowded out on the deck to view the scenery as they passed up the great "Father of Waters."

Fred and Terry had fished and hunted down in the country, and they explained to Evelyn all about the mode of life in the lagoon region.

Evelyn had fallen in love with the two Elon sisters, and their father became such an admirer of Fred and Terry that he insisted that they should not go to any hotel, but during the twenty-four hours that they spent in the city they should be his guests; so when the steamer landed at the wharf in New Orleans, he divided the party so that his wife and one of his daughters should drive home in the family carriage with Evelyn and Terry, while he and Fred and his other daughter should remain on board the steamer until the carriage returned for them.

When they reached his residence they found that it was one of the finest and most beautiful homes in the city, and that everything about it told of great wealth.

The next day Fred and Terry accompanied Mr. Elon downtown to visit certain friends, and the Creole gentleman soon learned that his guests had many other friends there, too.

But for the fact that they were in a hurry to reach Crabtree, they would have remained in the city as their guests for at least a week.

As it was, they spent another day there, and had a royal good time.

Then they took leave of their newfound friends, boarded the train for Texas, and were soon whirling westward. It was a long ride from the Crescent City to Crabtree, for that place was way down on the western side of the State, and it was late in the night when they reached there; in fact, long past midnight.

Fred had wired to the clerk of the hotel for him to reserve comfortable quarters for them, and when he arrived he found that the best rooms in the house had been assigned to them.

When they appeared in the breakfast room the next morning at quite a late hour for that meal, all the ladies stopping at the hotel were on the lookout for them. Those of them who knew Evelyn rushed into her arms.

"Great Scott, Fred!" said Terry. "Here we are with our arms ready to receive them, and not one will even put up a pucker at us."

"Well, what show can we expect to get with such a rival as Evelyn?"

Many of the ladies had already had their breakfast, but they went in and sat with Evelyn, and their tongues rattled like those of so many magpies.

Of course, they all shook hands with Fred and Terry, and talked freely with them. They wanted to know when Miss Hamilton was going to come down.

"Oh, she'll come down some time," laughed Evelyn, "probably on her bridal tour."

"Oh, she wouldn't come down as you did, eh?"

"No, we begged hard for her to do so, but she wouldn't. Brother will have to go up some time and bring her down. Then, too, we will have two brides down at the ranch, for young Mr. Cameron has a sweetheart up in New York, and she is waiting for him to build and furnish a big house, for her."

"Well," said one of the ladies, "work on that house is going on fast; but, look here, Miss Olcott, are you going to stay down there on that ranch, or are you going to stop here at the hotel?"

"Oh, she'll do both," put in Fred. "She is very fond of the actual life of a ranch. She often came down to our ranch in Colorado with four or five other girls, and she delighted in nothing so much as dashing over the prairie on horseback, chasing coyotes and jack-rabbits, or else feeding the pigs, chickens, and the milch-cows, all of which we had in abundance around us there. We have some fine milch-cows on the ranch now, and I expect to see her out every morning with her sleeves rolled up and a big apron on, milking them and looking after the pigs and chickens. She pets every animal on the place."

Whereupon Evelyn invited several of the ladies to come down and visit her on the ranch and help her feed the pigs and chickens and milk the cows.

"But I'll have to ask you to wait until I see what sort of quarters brother and Mr. Fearnot have for me."

"We have nothing but a plain ranch house, but there are plenty of them, for we haven't put in the improvements we intend to. Men, you know, can rough it; but sister will have a neat room fixed up for her. We will get the best furniture that can be found in this place, carpets and everything necessary for a lady's comfort."

"No, brother," said Evelyn, "I want to rough it, and you promised that I could do so."

"Oh, yes; but I know you girls, and you get tired of roughing it very quickly."

"Well, let me rough it until I do get tired, and when I feel that I have had enough I'll let you know."

"All right; that's a bargain."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW FRED AND TERRY FIXED UP EVELYN'S HOME ON THE RANCH

The next morning, after their arrival at Crabtree, Fred, Terry and Evelyn were kept busy shaking hands with their friends. As the news spread through the city fully a score of young ladies called at the hotel to see Evelyn, for she had the happy faculty of making and retaining friends wherever she went.

Fred and Terry, though, at noon, took leave of her and told her to enjoy herself until they came back, as they were going down to the ranch and begin at once to fix up things so that she could be comfortable.

Jack happened to be at the water tank when the engine of the freight train stopped there to take a drink, and he gave a regular Indian war-whoop when he saw the boys alight. He hugged both of them as they climbed down from the engine, and fairly danced a jig in his delight at seeing them.

Terry looked around for the big house that Jack had been building for his mother and sweetheart. When he saw it, he exclaimed:

"Great Scott, Jack! What is that you are building out there? A hotel?"

"Well, I call it my bachelor quarters, for the present," he replied; "but when mother comes it will be our home."

"Well, what in thunder do you want with such a big house? It's big enough for all the cowboys on both ranches to live in."

"Well, there is no hotel down here, you know, and there is not likely to be one for several years to come; so, when any friends come down to visit us, we'll have a place to take care of them."

"Jack," said Terry, "Evelyn came down with us."

"Great Scott! Ain't I glad! But why didn't you bring your girl with you?"

"She wouldn't come, Jack; but sister came down with us, as she wanted to help us build up a home out here. So, until your mother and Katy comedown, we'll let her be boss."

"Yes, and what a boss she will be. I've been telling these fellows around here that she is the most beautiful young lady in the whole country. But when is she coming down?"

"Just as soon as we can fix up one of the four-room houses for her, for we will live there until we can build a larger house."

"What do you want to build a house for when my house is large enough for forty people?"

"Oh we want to get into our own home. We want to build a residence down at the mineral spring."

"Oh, that's a mile off."

"Yes, so it is. The depot here, though, is a general resort for every rough character who comes along; but we'll have some of our lady friends down here both from Crabtree and from the North. We'll fence in the spring to keep the cattle from crowding around it, make beautiful flower gardens, raise all sorts of vegetables and fruits, and try to make our home here as lovely as our home up at New Era was."

Jack and Terry led the way up to the house in which Jack had been living, each carrying a valise.

Before they reached there, at least half a dozen cowboys rushed up and wanted to carry the valises for them, and made every demonstration of pleasure at the return of the "Bosses."

When the boys reached the house they found that one of bed-rooms furnished and still another which had not been furnished up.

"Jack, my boy," said Fred, "I see you have been keeping quite comfortable since we left."

"Yes, and at the same time quite busy."

"Well, have you had any trouble with the cowboys?"

"No, only in one instance, when one of the men got drunk and I promptly discharged him. He was one of your men, too. He refused to be discharged, and wouldn't leave, but went on working with the others. I then told him that I wouldn't pay him a cent at the end of the month for his work, as he was doing it of his own accord, and needn't expect any pay for it. After a week he signed the pledge, came around to see me, and said that he wished to apologize, and that he would never touch another drop of whisky. I told him that on those conditions he could keep his place, but that I would keep his written pledge to show to you, so that if he ever broke it you would know what to do."

"That's right, my boy, that's right. It don't pay to be too harsh. Always give a man a chance. You were fortunate in not having any more trouble than that."

"Well, I did have several other little difficulties which did not amount to much of anything; but at least a score of big, rough fellows are waiting for you two to return home in order to get a chance to enter your employ."

"Well, we'll need a few more men, Jack, for we are going to buy another thousand head of cattle and rush them down to the ranch as soon as possible. How has the store been getting along?"

"It's been doing fine. I've done a good business, and the trade is growing fast."

"Any cattle thieves been getting in their work?"

"Well, I haven't heard of any, and I have had the cattle rounded up three or four times and counted them; but I haven't much faith in the accuracy of the count. I am beginning to suspect that both ranches have lost a few, for I fear that the cowboys haven't kept as strict a watch as they should have done. One day three big, rough fellows came into the store and wanted to raise a rough house, and I requested one of my cowboys to go in there with me and help me to preserve the peace. Do you remember that fellow whose name was Nick Henderson?"

"Yes, I know him," said Terry. "Did he stand by you all right?"

"You can bet he did. I wouldn't swap him for any of the cowboys I've seen since I landed here. He doesn't understand the science of boxing, but he does know how to use his muscles and no mistake, for he fanned out two of those fellows with bare fists. One of them wanted to use his gun, but I drew mine, and said that I would shoot first; so Nick just cleaned out both of them, and I believe he is like you and Mr. Fearnot—not afraid of anything. He is now said to be the best man on either ranch, and he feels proud of the name."

Jack pointed out the house which he assigned to the carpenters, saying that they had built bunks, brought down their own blankets and cooking utensils, and that they were all satisfied with their work and their way of living.

"I furnish them meat and bread," he said, "and they do their own cooking, and I've been cooking my own meals, too."

"What sort of a cook are you, Jack."

"Well, I guess I weigh at least ten pounds more than I did when you left here. Whether it is good cooking or not, I don't know; but it is good, wholesome fare. I made coffee just as you taught me. I'm not good at making biscuit, but I can make a good hoe-cake."

They went into Jack's kitchen, and looking at his utensils, saw that he had a place for everything, and everything in its place.

"Jack; how did you learn to cook so well?" Terry asked.

"Why, I used to help mother a good deal, and I have the timber brought up and cut and piled away, so it is easy to build a fire. I had a well driven down in the yard out there, and a pump attached to it. It is not as good water as that down at the spring, but it is better than the average well around through this State, and I didn't have to drive down but thirty feet, either."

"Good! If you were wrecked on a lone island, you would get along all right, my boy. What is the bill of fare at your hotel now?"

"Just anything you want that the market affords. When I want fish I go but to the lake and get it. When I want quail or prairie chicken they come right up to the house to be shot."

"All right, Jack. We'll help you cook, and if anything more is needed than the market here affords, we will get it from Crabtree."

On further inspection they found that he didn't have a carpet in the house, but that he had good sheets and blankets and pillows and first-class mattresses.

"Fred," said Terry, "we'll have to live in this house until Jack gets his home finished. We'll measure the size of those two rooms back there, and one of us must go back to town to-morrow, buy carpets, have them made, and lay in all other necessaries for Evelyn's comfort, and let her invite some of the ladies up there to come down and rough it with us as long as they are willing to do so. Evelyn, of course, will go with us and assist us in making the purchases."

They went out into the stable lot, saw the horses kept there. Then they visited the cow lot and their barns, and saw that the milch-cows were looking well, and, of course, fat and yielding an abundant supply of milk, which Jack sent up to Crabtree every day, besides having plenty of butter and milk for all the cowboys in their employ.

Jack, too, had a good flock of chickens in his barn-yard, so he had plenty of eggs; but he stated that he had not killed a single chicken since Fred and Terry had gone North, as he preferred quail and prairie chicken. He also stated that he had been compelled to clip their wings very close, as his cowboys told him that if they got out they would find such abundant feed in grass seed and other products of the plain that they wouldn't come back home again.

"Don't you believe that, Jack. If a hen raises a flock of chickens and she and they are fed regularly, they will never leave the place; but chickens who are allowed to run everywhere, as most ranchmen let their chickens, will, of course, become wild like any other fowl."

There were about a score of little pigs on the lot that were as fat as butter and gentle as kittens.

"By George, Terry," said Fred, "won't Evelyn be delighted with these little fellows? But we will have to have ducks and turkeys."

"Yes, we can keep the ducks in bounds all right; but it will be a little difficult to keep the turkeys in, unless we have a wire fence enclosure reaching up about fifteen feet high."

"Oh, we can do that. Turkeys are very fond of wandering over a wide range; but I think we can keep them in bounds."

That night, they had a good supper of broiled beefsteak, good hoe-cake, milk and butter, and coffee in abundance. The two boys praised Jack highly for his skill in managing things, and, of course, he felt very proud.

They told him that Broker Middleton had used some money belonging to his mother, and had made about twenty thousand dollars for her, which she had sent by them in a draft which she had purchased in the bank.

Jack fairly whooped with joy.

"It's just in time," said he, "for I haven't been able to sell any cattle at this season of the year."

"Jack," said Terry, "don't you worry about the future. You just take good care of that money and don't use it except for necessities. How are the cattle on your place?"

"Mr. Olcott, they are the finest cattle I ever saw in my life. You would be astounded to see how they have picked up flesh. The ranchman that we bought them from must have had very poor ranges for them to feed on."

"Oh, well, the grass out here has never been fed on before, except by stray cattle, so I don't wonder at their being fat. When cold weather comes we'll have many thousands of pounds more than the ranches above here."

After supper some of the cowboys from both ranches came in to have a talk with their employers. Every one of them was smoking a pipe, as they could always buy tobacco at the store. The stock in the little store had about doubled since Fred and Terry went north, showing that a good business had been done.

"Jack, does the storekeeper keep his accounts straight?"

"Oh, yes. I watch him very closely. I think he is an honest man too, and he doesn't sell anything on a credit except to the cowboys on your ranch and mine. Other cowboys come in and want credit, but I told him not to credit anybody off of our two ranches, as we can then always know how much they owe before paying them off. The storekeeper says that cowboys are generally careless about paying debts, except in bar-rooms."

Before going to bed, Fred and Terry measured the size of the two rooms that they wanted to fit up for Evelyn, and Fred boarded the first freight train engine that went up the next morning and so reached Crabtree before Evelyn had finished her breakfast. She was very much surprised at seeing him.

"Fred," said she, "where is brother?"

"He is down at the ranch, just the happiest boy you ever saw in your life. He had milked two of the cows by sunrise this morning."

"I never knew brother to do such a thing before in his life," she laughed. "How many cows are there?"

"Oh, about a dozen, and their milk is as rich as butter, and as yellow as gold. It would tickle you to death to see Jack feed the little pigs buttermilk. Each little pig tries to get more of it than his neighbor, and then just to think, too, we have a good flock of chickens, those we bought before we went up North; and Jack has never killed one. On the contrary, he has bought upwards of a dozen hens, and the barn lot is just overrun with little ones."

"Why, hasn't he killed any of them. Fred? Doesn't he like chicken?"

"Yes, he is very fond of them; but the quails and prairie chickens actually come up and beg to be shot, and he has never had a chance at an unlimited supply of game before in his life."

"Oh, Fred, when are you going back down there?"

"I'm going to-night."

"Well, can I go back with you?"

"Not just yet. I want you to go with me, though, and help me select two carpets, which will be on the floor of your home."

So she ran upstairs and got her hat and gloves, and went out with him.

She wanted to select coarse ingrain carpets, saying that fine carpets were not needed on a ranch.

"Evelyn, you must select the very best velvet carpets that can be found in this city."

"Fred, that is reckless extravagance."

"No, it isn't. A good velvet carpet will last just twice as long as an ingrain one. I'm not going to buy anything cheap. The best is always the cheapest. I want sofas, chairs, rockers, and tables, and then such other dainties as your good taste may suggest. It is to be the home of my sweetheart and Terry's sister, and we expect you to have quite a number of young ladies from Crabtree to go down there and spend as long a time as they choose, to be company for you. Then I'll buy a bookcase and have plenty of books and magazines; for both Terry and you, as well as I, are fond of good reading. Then we must have some good strong oilcloth to put on the kitchen and dining room floors," and she followed Fred's instructions, and made her choice of the carpets, and Fred, in paying for them, offered them to the dealer to have them made up at once. Then they selected chairs, tables, bureaus, a bookcase, and everything else that was conducive to comfort.

Evelyn was a little bit surprised when she saw what the total amount came to, but Fred told her that she must not put in any objections, whatever. He said that if she wanted to rough it she could go out of doors into the barn lot, the cow lot, and the lot in which the pigs and chickens were kept and amuse herself to her heart's content.

The greater part of the day was taken up in making their purchases. Then, about sunset, Fred returned to the ranch on the engine of a freight, leaving Evelyn in the hotel.

The lady guests of the house were quite disappointed, as they thought they would hear him sing and play during the evening, but she told them that he was preparing a house down on the ranch for her and a number of their friends there in Crabtree, whom they were calculating on being able to persuade to go down and spend some time with them.

Of course, quite a number of them were quite eager to go.

All that night Evelyn was dreaming of feeding a big flock of little chickens and little pigs, and looking after and petting the mild-eyed milch-cows, and awoke fully convinced that she was going to have the happiest time of her life with her brother and her sweetheart as her daily companions.

Many a time had she milked her mother's cows in Fredonia, and she enjoyed the exercise as well as making butter.

Butter-making was a passion with her, and she understood it to perfection.

The next day she talked quite a while with several married ladies, particularly those who understood housekeeping and milking and butter-making. The ladies seemed to be surprised at her enthusiasm, and asked her if she had ever milked a cow, or churned butter, and her replies actually staggered some of them.

She said that if she were worth a million dollars, that there was no amusement she would rather indulge in than to milk cows, feed chickens, gather eggs, and do all sorts of domestic work.

The idea of a society girl indulging in such amusements seemed incredible to the ladies at the hotel.

Three days passed, which Fred and Terry improved by cleaning up around the house. When the carpets came down, with men to lay them, the furniture was moved in, and shades and lace curtains put up, until really the plain little ranch house was more elegantly furnished than many of the homes of the richest citizens in Crabtree.

Then, Terry went up to Crabtree after Evelyn. He went on a freight train engine, and Evelyn wanted to come back on the same; but he insisted upon hiring a carriage at the livery stable and driving her through.

CHAPTER V.

EVELYN ON THE NEW RANCH.

Two young ladies at Crabtree offered to go down to the ranch with Evelyn, but she suggested to them to wait until she first found out whether the new home was one to which she would like to invite them.

"If the place is such that I can offer you comfort, I will notify you, without delay," so they remained behind at the hotel.

The driver then started off down the road at a clipping pace. Terry had hired a splendid team, and the driver understood well how to manage the beautiful horses.

The dirt road ran all the way down in sight of the railroad. They passed many beautiful suburban residences during the first three or four miles, after which they passed farmhouses and then the road stretched white and straight over the wide prairies.

Terry had directed that Evelyn's two trunks be sent down by freight. Evelyn enjoyed the ride very much.

"Brother," said she, "the grass seems to be greener and richer down through this country than up in Colorado."

"Yes, and so it is, else we wouldn't have bought down here. We have some advantages here that we didn't have up there. There we had to drive our cattle and receive our freight twenty miles away; but now the railroad runs right along beside us, and the depot is on our side of the track. Jack's ranch borders the road on the other side. The company has laid side tracks for each ranch, and built a good depot. I think, in the course of time, we'll have a far more beautiful home down here than we had up in Colorado. Of course, though, Fred has told you all about the magnificent mineral spring a mile from the railroad and on the ranch."

"Yes, both of you have told me all about it."

"Well, Fred thinks it best to build a residence right down there near the spring in order that we may have the use of the water and some large shade trees in the yard."

"Terry, isn't there any building there now?"

"No, the only buildings we have now are merely four-room frame buildings for the men on the place, and we have fixed up one of them for our home until we build a larger and better house down near the spring. There isn't a particle of swamp about it; but there is plenty of good solid earth all around it. Of course, we can cut a splendid road from the depot down to it. We will build stables and all the necessary out-houses down there, too, and will fence it in, so that the cattle cannot annoy the residents of the place. There isn't a passenger depot built yet, and passenger trains don't even stop there, unless they are flagged by the freight agent."

The road passed through several patches of timber and wide stretches of prairie land presenting scenery that Evelyn loved and admired very much. The splendid team made the trip in a little over two hours, a distance of twenty miles.

"You see that big building going up out there?" said Terry, pointing to Jack's new home.

"Yes."

"Well, that is the new house that Jack is building for his mother and his wife. It has a dozen large rooms in it."

"Well, what in the world does he want with such a big house away out here?" Evelyn asked.

"Well, it is the first house he ever owned, and he says he wants it roomy enough for his wife's and mother's friends to come down and stay as long as they please, as it will cost him nothing to board them. I guess that Fred and I will build a house just as big as that."

"Terry, you and Fred must not indulge in any such extravagance."

"Sister, don't you know that comfort is not extravagance?" The driver had never been out there before, so he turned and asked Terry where he must stop.

"Right in front of that house out there," and he pointed to the house which he and Fred had furnished for their home until a big house could be put up.

Both Fred and Jack were on the lookout for them. Evelyn saw them waving their hats and she waved her parasol in return. They reached the house about the time that the carriage did, and of course, as Fred lifted her out of the carriage he caught Evelyn in his arms and kissed her several times. Jack seized her hand and kissed it, saying:

"Heavens, Miss Evelyn, but I am glad to see you way down here."

"Thank you, Jack," said Evelyn.

Then she turned and glanced around at the wild prairies on either side of the railroad track.

"Evelyn," said Fred, "come in and see the little home we have fixed up for you," and he led her up on the little piazza and into the two rooms that had been furnished up for her.

Of course, she recognized the carpet, because she had chosen it herself up in Crabtree, and also every piece of furniture.

"Oh, my, how beautiful!" she exclaimed. "But how out of place such furniture in a ranch house! I dare say there is not another so beautifully furnished as this is in the State of Texas."

"No," said Fred, "nor is there another house in all Texas with such a beautiful mistress to reign over it."

She laughed and seemed pleased with the compliment.

As soon as she could throw off her hat and light coat she said:

"Now, Fred, let me see the kitchen and the dining-room."

"All right. This leads into the dining-room," so she went in there and seemed equally pleased with its furnishings and then she looked into the china closet and found two complete sets of china dishes.

Then she went into the kitchen, where Fred and Terry had set up a first-class range to take the place of the wide-open fireplace which Jack had been using. The carpenters had built a splendid closet for all the cooking utensils. There were all the necessary tables and chairs there in the kitchen. She went to the sink and, turning the faucet, saw a splendid flow of water.

"Why, where in the world does this water come from?" she asked, very much surprised.

"Oh, that is one of Jack's ideas," replied Fred. "While we were away he got permission from the superintendent of the railroad to run a pipe from the railroad company's tank, some three hundred yards away, and thus provided for a supply of water for household purposes as well as a bathroom. Those are New York ideas which he brought out here with him, and people who have visited the premises wondered what the Yankee boy was up to. Of course the water isn't for drinking purposes, for he has a driven well out in the yard, and the water is very good; but still it is not like that down at the spring."

She turned around and patting Jack on the shoulder said:

"Jack, were you thinking of your mother or of Katy when you were fixing up all these comforts?"

"Of both, Miss Evelyn," he answered, "for mother is as fond of comforts as any other woman. She does her own cooking, and I am having water pipes run from the same source into our house."

"By and by," he continued, "I'm going to see if I can't find artesian water somewhere on the premises, and have it running through the house all the time."

"Good boy! Good boy!" laughed Evelyn. "Now, brother tells me that you have pigs and chickens and milch-cows on the place, and I want to see them at once."

Terry and Fred and Jack went out with her. They first went to the big stable, saw the saddle and carriage horses that they had bought, and she was pleased with their appearance.

"Evelyn, here are a pair of grays," said Fred, "which Terry and I say belong to you and Mary, and we hope you will love them as much and train them as you did those up at Fredonia."

"Oh, my. That is work for me, but I am glad of it. Have they good dispositions?"

"Yes, the stable-man says that they are kind and gentle and very susceptible to kind treatment."

From the big stable they emerged into the big barn lot, passed through a gate in a division fence, and saw a big flock of chickens. There were about one hundred of the little things, all like little balls of down, following clucking mother hens all over the place.

Evelyn went into such expressions of delight at seeing a splendid flock that made the boys smile.

"Haven't you any turkeys?" she asked.

"Not one," said Jack. "All the cowboys told me that the turkeys would go off and find such an abundant supply of things to eat that they can't be kept at home. But we have ducks and geese, which are kept over in another lot."

"Then they passed through another gate, where Evelyn saw a row of cow-sheds, and a half dozen splendid looking Jersey cows.

"Oh, my," she cried. "I never saw such fat, beautiful milch-cows in my life."

Jack ran up to two of the cows and put his arms around their necks, patted their faces and noses, and the mild-eyed beauties seemed to enjoy the petting.

"Fred, where in the world did you and brother find Jersey cows way down this way?"

"Oh, we found them on some ranches on the line of the railroad further back east. We paid a pretty good price for them, too. Down here the ranchmen don't seem to understand the value of the Jersey cow; so when we offered them a price that seemed the least bit extravagant, they readily parted with them. We are going to get more of them, for milk and butter sell readily all along the line of the road; but we don't sell any buttermilk, though, for we let the little pigs have that, and the little chickens, too. Jack had an experienced man to build a dairy house in the latest approved style.

"Jack, is there any buttermilk in the dairy house now?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir; but I'll go and inquire." So he went to the dairyman who had charge of the cows and the dairy house and found out that he had about half a barrel of buttermilk, just a little bit sour.

"Then have him bring several bucketfuls out to the little pigs."

The dairyman brought two big pails full of the buttermilk and poured it into a big sheet-iron receptacle, circular in form and about four inches deep. The little pigs came running up to the gate, crying like little pigs do when they smell food, and the gate was opened to let them get at it, and every one, of course, stuck his nose into the buttermilk clear up to his eyes, and they drank and pushed against each other until their stomachs actually looked swollen.

Evelyn stood and looked on, her eyes fairly sparkling with delight. She picked up several of the little fellows, who seemed to be used to being handled. They behaved, of course, like all little pet pigs.

"Oh, what a sight!" she exclaimed. "How I do wish mother could see it."

"And Mary, too," added Terry.

"Yes, for she, too, is very fond of pigs and chickens, and milch cows."

When the little pigs couldn't drink any more buttermilk they were driven back into the lot where the sows were, and then the big pans were shoved in so that the sows could drink the balance. Then they showed Evelyn where the ducks and geese were kept.

"Why in the world don't you let them run out and graze? Don't you know that ducks and geese live on grass just like cows and horses?"

"Yes, but we haven't arranged for that yet. These ducks and geese were bought by Jack, while we were up in New York and there is such a wide range that he has been afraid, to turn them out to go where they please. Then, the coyotes, too, are very fond of ducks and geese. A chicken can rise on the wing and get away, but fat ducks and geese can be caught before they can flap their wings three times. We will gradually build a wire mesh fence and turn them out so they will be protected from the coyotes and foxes."

After that Evelyn took a look at the dairy house. It had been built in first-class style by an experienced dairyman, and was large enough to manage the products of fifty cows if necessary, and Fred made the remark that he hoped to some day have that many Jersey cows on hand.

"Sister," put in Terry, "it won't cost a dollar a month more out here to keep a dozen milch cows than it would cost to keep a half dozen, for they can feed on the grass all day long, and at the present season the grass is very full of milk, and there are two of these cows whose yield of milk is so abundant that it is necessary to milk them at noon."

"Brother," she asked, "how is the grass in the winter? Does it dry up and turn brown like the grass in Colorado?"

"Yes, I believe it does; but the winters down here are at least two months shorter than they are up in Colorado. We expect to cut several hundred tons of hay while it is yet young and fresh and full of milk, and feed that to the milch cows during the winter. The beef cattle on the range can keep fat on the dry grass like those on all ranches do."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," replied Evelyn, "for by that means you will have the abundant supply of milk that you are now getting."

She inspected every part of the dairy, particularly the arrangement for keeping all of the utensils perfectly clean.

Then she returned to the house, when Fred invited her to come out to the store.

"Why, goodness gracious!" she exclaimed. "Have you a store out here?"

"Yes; that building out there fronting on the wagon road is the store, and it does a particularly good business with the ranchmen who drive along the road."

"Well, well, well! What do you keep on sale there?"

"Oh, we've got an experienced salesman, who was raised in the business. He sells everything in the dry goods line and groceries and patent medicines. Of course, the dry goods are only such as ranchmen and farmers' wives need. If you want silks and fancy ribbons you would have to drive to Crabtree. Drummers come along nearly every day with samples of goods their employers have for sale, so if you want anything different from what we have in the store, you can order it through them."

"Well, I want to go in there and see the stock," so she went over with the boys, and Terry introduced her to the storekeeper as his sister. He was a single man, so he stared at her in open-eyed wonder, as she was perhaps the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life. She found that there was a little of almost everything that was kept in a country store. There was very little fancy goods, however, to be had there.

While they were in the store a two-horse wagon drove up and stopped in front of the store. The wagon was driven by an old farmer, who had with him his wife and two daughters. Fred and Terry ran out of the store to help the ladies out of the wagon.

"Mrs. Jones," said Terry, "I am really glad that you have come. My sister arrived to-day, and you are the first neighbor that she will meet."

"Oh, my! Is she going to live here on the ranch?"

"Yes, until she gets tired of it. Then she will run up and stop at the hotel at Crabtree for a change. But she is of a domestic turn, and as we intend to have everything that can be raised on a ranch, we think that she will be satisfied to stay."

He was well acquainted with Mrs. Jones and her husband as well as the two daughters, so he led the women into the store, where he introduced them to Evelyn by name.

The girls were about fifteen and eighteen years of age, respectively, and as Evelyn shook hands with them and welcomed them, they stared at her as though she were a royal personage.

"Girls," said she, addressing the two daughters, "this is the first time I was ever on this ranch. Brother and Mr. Fearnot owned a ranch up in Colorado, and there was no other ranch like it in all that state. I am very fond of domestic life. They have a big flock of chickens, ducks and geese and a splendid dairy-house, where they make fine butter and give the buttermilk to the pigs. I have just been over the place to see them, and I am as happy as the youngest pig on the place," and she laughed so merrily that the girls forgot that she was a stranger and laughed heartily with her, but her dress was so much better than that which they wore that they actually felt awed as they looked her over.

"Mrs. Jones," she said, turning to the mother, "how far is it from this place to your home?"

"Oh, it's fully ten miles. We are running a farm, not a ranch; but I don't know what to make of your brother and Mr. Fearnot raising pigs and chickens and making butter for sale on a ranch. I never heard of such things being done on a ranch before."

"Oh, brother and Mr. Fearnot believe in raising everything that can pick a living on the big ranch. There are now a thousand beef cattle on the ranch, and it costs nothing but the hire of the cowboys to raise them."

"Oh, yes, I know that. But I never heard of chickens and geese and ducks and pigs being raised on a ranch before."

"Well, they will probably have a hundred milch cows soon, for it doesn't cost any more to keep

them than it does to keep the beef cattle."

CHAPTER VI.

EVELYN'S FIRST DAY ON THE NEW RANCH.

Evelyn extended a cordial invitation to Mrs. Jones and her two daughters to drive over to the ranch-house some day and spend the day with her, and the mother gladly accepted the invitation. The girls were two healthy-looking lasses, both blondes with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Terry kept the old man busy telling him of the improvements that they were contemplating making on the ranch and of the residence that they would build down by the big mineral spring.

"Great rattlers!" the old man exclaimed. "You're sho gwine to spend a lot of money, ain't you?"

"Yes, we've got to in order to get a good start. If you know of any ranchmen within a hundred miles of us who want to sell a hundred or two beef cattle just tell us where to find him and we'll go after the cattle."

"Waal, I don't believe I know of any just now who want to sell any cattle other then to the market, but I reckon you can find plenty of them along the line of the railroad."

"How many cattle do you want to buy?" he asked.

"About one thousand," was the reply.

"Land! but you'll have a big lot of 'em."

"Oh, we could keep ten thousand on the ranch and keep them fat, too, for the grass down here is very rich."

"Yes, too rich for the farmers. We raise grass on our farms all summer. We raise a heap of corn and cotton."

"Yes, we will raise corn, too, next year, for the use of our horses and hogs, but not for the cattle."

"Gwine to raise pork, eh?"

"Yes, pork will sell in the market just as readily as beef will, and we are going to raise our own supplies for our cowboys and for family use. We have forty thousand acres on the range, which is room enough to feed several hundred people, as well as the cattle on the range and ducks, pigs and chicken. I believe that our dairyman is making some of the finest butter ever seen in this part of the South. It is sweet and rich and as yellow as gold. Generally one can't get a glass of milk or a pound of butter on any ranch, because the ranchmen don't take the trouble to make it. Everything pays that is raised on a ranch, and the greater the variety the more pay."

"That's so," said the old man, shaking the ashes from his corncob pipe; "but I reckon you'll have considerable trouble with coyotes and cattle thieves."

"Yes, we expect to have a little trouble with them, but we have a way of dealing with cattle thieves which we have found to be very corrective. Every cowboy on our ranch has a Winchester rifle, and a lead pill from one of them makes a cattle thief sick. Then, too, a rope is something very distasteful to that breed of mankind, and as for coyotes, we will enclose that part of the ranch where we are keeping the pigs and ducks and chickens with a high wire-net fence, which no coyote can scale."

"Mister, wire fences cost a heap of money."

"Very true; but they will pay for themselves in one season."

By and by the old farmer's wife and daughters, having made their little purchases in the store, came out to the wagon ready to start home.

Evelyn came out with them and was on the best of terms with all three. She shook hands with Farmer Jones and told him that his wife and daughters had promised to come over and spend the day with her in the near future, and that if he put up any objection to that he would probably get himself into trouble.

"All right, miss," said he. "I'll let 'em come and will drive 'em, too."

"Do so," she replied. "We'll set you down at the head of the table and see that you get plenty to eat."

"Waal, miss, don't offer me any jerked beef, for I can't eat it."

"Neither can I," she laughed, "and we never have it on our table. We'll give you fish, prairie chicken, quail, jack-rabbit and that genuine old Southern dish, bacon and greens."

"That's it. You can bet on my coming, and right soon, too. Bacon and greens is a dish fit for a king, but you haven't got any on this ranch, I reckon."

"No, we'll buy that in town, as we do sugar and tea and coffee, and if you are fond of coffee, brother and Mr. Fearnot can certainly make the best that you ever tasted."

"Gosh! I do love it."

Fred and Terry assisted the mother and her two daughters into the wagon, and the girls they literally lifted off their feet by catching them around the waist and lifting them up as though they were little five-year-old-children. The girls blushed and laughed, and Evelyn really enjoyed their confusion.

They all drove off, waving their handkerchiefs at Evelyn and the boys.

"Fred," said Evelyn, "they are plain, good, honest folks. The mother is a good woman and the girls do their share of the household work at home. Their hands show it."

"Yes, and yet the old man is able to keep good servants for them, for black servants are cheap down in this region, and by the way, dear, when you go up to Crabtree again, you must start an inquiry for a good colored cook among your lady friends. Tell them you want a good one, who understands washing and ironing and all about cooking. At present we boys do all the cooking down here and we send our laundry up to Crabtree, where there are only three Chinamen to the whole town."

"Fred, let me do the cooking at present," she asked.

"Oh, yes, it's fun for you now; but you would get tired at it after a while."

"I'll make you boys do the rough work. When you go out to hunt in the woods you go to sleep on the ground on blankets and do your own cooking, so it certainly won't hurt you to rough it a little now."

"No, it never did hurt us; but Terry and I know that there are at least a score of young ladies in Crabtree who want to come down here out of curiosity and for a change. We are going to have two additional rooms built onto the house so that the two bedrooms that are now furnished can be given up to them and we boys will occupy the annex."

That evening they sat up quite late talking and planning.

"See here, Fred," said Terry, "we have no musical instrument on the ranch, so sister had better go in to-morrow and buy a piano."

"Oh, my! how extravagant you boys are becoming," she exclaimed. "The idea of a piano on a ranch would certainly astonish the natives."

"Yes, so it would, but for all that we've got to have it."

"Well, one of you must go in after it, for I won't."

"I'll go," said Terry, "for a good piano we must have; and, besides that, we must have a good violin, a good flute, and—"

"A bass drum," Evelyn interrupted.

"Yes," added Fred, "and a hurdy-gurdy."

The next morning Evelyn, was up before either of the boys, for as soon as she heard the little chickens peeping around she sprang up, put on a wrapper and went out to see them and feed them.

The dairyman was up feeding and milking the cows. Evelyn looked on for a while, and finally took up a pail and began milking, too. The dairyman looked on in astonishment.

"Great rattlers, miss!" he exclaimed. "Where did you learn how to milk?"

"Why, up at my home in New York state," she replied. "I made all the butter from two splendid cows, and more often did the milking than the hired help did."

"Well," said he, "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen you milking this morning."

She was talking with the dairyman when Fred showed up, exclaiming:

"Hello! Why didn't you make an alarm when you got up so that I could have heard it."

"Oh, I didn't like to break up little boys' sleep. It is good for them."

The dairyman chuckled at the retort, and so did Fred.

Evelyn milked the pail full, turned it over to the dairyman and went to see the little pigs.

"Evelyn," said Fred, "how would you like to take a ride over the ranch? We'll get back in time for breakfast."

"I would like it very much, provided you give me a safe horse to ride."

Fred went into the stable and saddled the big grays. They were almost a match in size and appearance for the two big grays which Evelyn had sold up North, and she greatly admired them. She stood there in the lot waiting for them to be made ready, and then, without going into the house to get a hat or any other article of dress, she placed her foot in Fred's hand, which he held out for her, and was quickly lifted in the saddle.

"Are you going without your hat, Evelyn?" Fred asked.

"Yes, the early morning sun can do me no harm, for it has hardly got its eyes open yet."

"All right; open the gate, Joe," and the dairyman went to the outer gate and held it open for them to pass through.

They went dashing down toward the spring, and when they reached there Fred dismounted, went to where a big, native-raised gourd was hanging to a bush, dipped it full of the water and handed it up to her.

She drank copiously of it, smacked her lips and said:

"Oh, my, Fred! I can taste both sulphur and iron plainly."

"Yes, those ingredients are the strongest in its composition, if it were nearer town it would become a the place of resort."

"Well, you must make it one, anyway. You must lay off the grounds beautifully, thin out the timber somewhat so flowers will grow and yet leave enough to form plenty of shade. Then if you build a few cottages, or maybe a hotel, it would easily become a resort—that is, if I am any judge of the water. It tastes perfectly delicious to me, and really I believe that it will finally prove the most valuable part of the ranch."

Then Fred led the way further down the road in a southerly direction, skirting the timber, and at almost every ten feet quail and prairie chickens flew up out of their way.

After they had gone about a couple of miles Evelyn suddenly saw something running through the tall grass as if trying to avoid being seen.

"Fred," said she, "aren't those wolves out there?"

"Where?" and Fred gazed in the direction in which she was pointing.

He could barely catch a glimpse of their backs through the tall grass.

"I guess they are coyotes," he said. "Let's give them a race," and he put spurs to his horse and dashed off after them. Evelyn, of course, followed, for she was quite as good a rider as he.

To his surprise, he gained on them, and he knew that the coyote was about the swiftest little animal of the kind anywhere, so he supposed that the tall grass was impeding their progress.

When he urged his horse faster the brutes turned, growled, showed their fangs and stood at bay.

"Great Scott, Evelyn!" he exclaimed, "they are timber wolves!" and his horse showed fear of them.

Evelyn reined up her horse right alongside of Fred.

"Why, Fred," said she, "they seem to be defying us, which is a mighty bold thing for them to do in the open daylight."

"Yes, indeed; but they saw that we were gaining on them. Luckily I have my revolver in my pocket," and with that he drew the weapon and again dashed toward the wolves, who seemed to be full of fight. When within fifteen feet of them he fired and the wounded wolf yelped with pain, while his mate seemed on the point of charging upon them. He fired the second time and the bullet crashed through the wolf's head. They both gave a single yelp, sank down in the grass and did a little kicking. The first one he had shot at hadn't been hit in a vital spot.

So he stood by snarling and showing his fangs until another shot stretched him on the ground alongside of his mate.

"Why, Fred," said Evelyn, as she rode up and looked at them after they were dead, "is it

possible that they come up so near the houses on the ranch?"

"Well, I never saw them up so far this way before. I fear that they came up during the night in search of a calf, and I dare say if we search around we can find a dead calf half devoured somewhere in the neighborhood; but we won't stop to look for it. We will go back to the house and send two cowboys down here to get the wolves' pelts, for we always let them have the pelts of any wild beasts that we kill." So they rode back to the house, and just as Terry and Jack were placing breakfast on the table Fred dismounted and assisted Evelyn to the ground. She ran into the house, while Fred went to the stable with the two horses and sent word around by the stableman to two of the cowboys to go down and get the pelts of the two wolves and make a search for the remains of any cow or calf that the wolves had probably killed during the night.

Before he returned to the house Evelyn had acquainted Terry with the result of their ride.

"I'm not surprised at it," said Terry. "Before we placed cattle on the two ranches wolves were rarely seen in this part of the locality. They come up from the river bottom, some thirty miles away, and I guess we will have to have a grand wolf hunt pretty soon. Jack's and ours are the only ranches between here and the river. There are farms, though; but they don't raise cattle enough to tempt the wolves to leave the swamp, and they kept their hogs pretty well protected by wire fences. I am surprised, though, that only two wolves were seen, for generally they go in gangs for protection. As a general thing they are afraid of the long-horned cattle, and they rarely attack the grown ones; but they manage to catch calves quite often, for these long-horned cattle can toss a wolf high in the air and probably give him his death-wound."

Fred came in and then they sat down to the table, on which was fried prairie chicken and broiled quail.

"Oh, my! such an appetite as I have," said Evelyn, "and I don't think I ever sat down to a more appetizing meal in my life."

Her cheeks were like roses, for the brisk ride in the morning air had flushed them beautifully.

"Terry, just look at those cheeks," said Fred, "did you ever see them glow more than now?"

"Oh, they'll glow every morning down here if she takes rides before breakfast."

They all ate heartily. Jack delighted in cooking since the new range had been put up.

Terry was an expert at broiling quail and any other kind of game, and they had fresh butter and milk.

"Brother," Evelyn said, during the meal, "last night Fred said that you would have to go to town to buy a piano. Are you going?"

"Yes, I guess I will."

"Then I want you to take several balls of this butter to several different ladies in town as presents from me and tell them that I want them to pick out a good cook for me. Not that I am too lazy to do the cooking myself, but because we will need a good, strong colored woman to do household and laundry work."

"Sensible!" remarked Fred.

"Then bring one or two young ladies down with you," he added.

"Oh, you needn't bring anybody down yet. I'm not becoming lonesome yet by any means. I don't believe I would ever get lonesome with chickens and cows and pigs and, ducks to look after."

"My, sister! are you going to take all that responsibility on your shoulders?"

"Yes, for I'm going to be boss of the entire ranch, boys and all."

"Good! Good!" exclaimed Fred.

"Fred, don't whoop until you get out of the woods," said Terry, "for you will soon find out her style of bossing. You will find her sitting on the fence somewhere yelling to you to do this and to do that, and be quick about it. I know what it is to work for a girl boss, so I will be sure that we'll get competent help if it can be had. I want to do a little bossing myself."

As soon as Evelyn could fix up five or six pounds of the rich, golden butter, pressed into pound cakes, Terry took the bucket in which she had placed them and waited for the first freight train that came along. Nearly a score of trains passed the ranch every twenty-four hours, going either east or west, it was about an hour's ride from the ranch to Crabtree. Terry sent the cakes of butter to the ladies whom Evelyn wanted to have them and delivered her message to the effect that she would be glad to have them find her a good, all-around cook and house servant.

Mrs. Westervelt, the wife of the railroad superintendent, said that she knew a cook who

would fill the bill.

"Send for her at once, please, madam, and tell her to get ready to move down to the ranch within a day or two. We will give her good wages and, besides, allow her to make money out of the cowboys by doing their washing, if she wishes to."

"Mr. Olcott," she asked, "did your sister make this butter?"

"No, she hasn't started that yet, but let me tell you there is no woman, North or South, who can beat her at butter making."

CHAPTER VII.

FRED AND TERRY AFTER CATTLE THIEVES.

Terry, being a good judge of musical instruments, went to a music store in Crabtree, ran his fingers over the keys of half a dozen different pianos, and quickly made his selection. Then he purchased a splendid violin, paying seventy-five dollars for it, which was the most costly violin that was ever sold in Crabtree, for he was very fond of good violin music. Then he bought a guitar, a banjo and a splendid flute. The dealer promised to send them all down to the ranch the next day.

"I'll take the violin and the flute myself," said Terry.

"Mr. Olcott," said the dealer, "we have a large selection of vocal and instrumental music. Would you like to look over it to make some selections?"

"Haven't time," he replied. "Sister may have a big quantity of her old music in her trunk, but if she didn't bring any down with her she can come down here some day and look over your stock."

"Here is a printed list of all the music now before the public."

"All right, I'll take that list to her," and he folded it up and put it in his pocket.

Then he went to see the two young ladies whom Evelyn had told him to bring down with him if they would come.

He found them, and, to his surprise, found them ready to go on an hour's notice. He told them that he would drive around for them with a carriage, as no passenger train ever stopped at the ranch unless it was flagged.

They told him that it didn't make any difference so long as they didn't have to walk.

They had never been on a ranch in their lives, although they were rather familiar with farm life around that locality. He went to the livery stable and hired the same team that had carried Evelyn out two days before.

Then he went to a well-known grocer and bought several cases of preserves and sweetmeats of various kinds to be sent down the next day, laid in a good stock of magazines, then drove around to the residence of the two young ladies, and when they were ready to go they started off for the ranch. Their trunks were to come down in a wagon.

The girls were delighted with everything they saw on the way.

When they reached the ranch Evelyn and Fred and Jack were at the store to greet them. While the two girls were hugging and kissing Evelyn, Fred and Terry threw their arms around each other and imitated them to the best of their ability; but, instead of kissing each other, they smacked their mouths over each other's shoulders and uttered expressions of joy in imitation of them. The girls were greatly amused, and the storekeeper almost went into convulsions of merriment.

"Now, girls," said Evelyn, "come over to the house with me and you'll see how we are roughing it out here." So she led the way from the store to the house which they called their home.

When they entered the two beautifully furnished rooms the girls uttered exclamations of surprise.

"Why, Evelyn," one of them exclaimed, "there isn't a prettier furnished house in all Crabtree. I can't see for the life of me why you call it roughing."

"Well, I call it roughing because we can do just as we please out here. There is nobody about to criticise us. I hope you brought some of your old clothes with you that won't be hurt by roughing it!"

"Yes, we brought some old dresses with us."

"All right, just as soon as your trunks come in put on your roughest suits and I'll show you how much fun we can have out here."

She then led them into the kitchen and dining-room.

One of the bedrooms had two beds in it, and all three of them would sleep in there, leaving Fred and Terry to have the other room.

A half hour later the girls' trunks were brought into the house and they proceeded at once to don what they called their home dresses.

Then Evelyn led them out to the poultry yard, to the cow-sheds and the dairy-house, Then they went to the big lot in which lived the sows and pigs. After that they visited the big stables, where Evelyn pointed with great pride to two big grays which the boys had bought for her, and there she told them the story of the grays she had owned before, how she had trained them so that she could drive them without bridles anywhere and guide them entirely by her voice.

One of the girls said that she couldn't train a Texas horse that way.

"Oh, any horse is susceptible to kindness, dear. I will soon have them so trained that they will follow me wherever I go and I'll teach them how to obey every command I give them. It takes time and patience, though."

"Evelyn, where is the big spring that we have heard so much about?"

"It is about a mile down that way," and she pointed southward. "To-morrow we will ride down there, for we have a large surrey and two horses for domestic use."

About sunset Evelyn insisted on their going out to the cowpen and see her milk. Up to that time they hadn't taken any stock in her claim that she could milk cows and make butter, and they regarded her as simply a society girl who wouldn't do any work at all; but the dairyman told them that she was the best milker he had ever seen.

It was a pretty big job, but she milked the half dozen Jersey cows, actually doing a man's work. Neither of the girls had ever milked a cow in their lives, for their parents didn't keep any cows at their city home.

That night they sat down to a game dinner of quail, jack-rabbits and prairie chickens.

Evelyn insisted on their standing by her in the kitchen and seeing her cook everything. They were satisfied that she had not been boasting, and such biscuit they had never tasted in their lives, notwithstanding the fact that their mother had a well-trained colored cook.

"Evelyn," the elder of the sisters asked, "you seem to know all about housework, but tell me how you manage to keep your hands so soft and white if you have been doing this sort of work before."

"Oh, I don't do it regularly, only when I take a notion to do so at home; but I think it is every woman's duty to learn such things, so that if she gets hold of an incompetent servant she can teach her."

The two girls were actually ashamed of their ignorance of domestic life.

During the evening Fred produced his violin and flute.

"Oh, my, brother!" exclaimed Evelyn, "that is a beautiful violin. What did you buy such an expensive one for?"

"Why, you know me, sister," he replied; "a harsh note grates on me worse than a crosscut saw going through a knotty log."

Evelyn seized the bow, resined it herself, tuned the violin and began playing like an expert. Fred took up the flute and accompanied her, making the most delightful music.

There were some cowboys in the store smoking and talking, but when they heard the violin and flute they all rushed out and stood at the gate, about forty feet away from the door, and listened, and there they stood, quiet and silent, for upwards of an hour.

Then Terry took the flute and the girls saw that he could play equally as well as Fred. Evelyn soon took up the guitar and accompanied him on that instrument.

Then she handed the guitar to Fred and took the flute from Terry.

The girls soon saw that she was perfectly at home with any musical instrument, and that the boys were, too.

Evelyn had the girls up with the sun the next morning. They were not in the habit of starting the day so early, but she laughed at them and told them they didn't know how to live.

She soon had them in the kitchen, where Jack had started a fire in the range, and began giving them culinary lessons.

It was great fun for her, and also for Fred and Terry.

Some two or three days later Fred left the ranch, going up by the passenger train, which was flagged for him to board it, and at Crabtree he took a train for points a hundred miles east, where he hired a team and driver to take him around among the ranches all through that section. He spent a week inspecting cattle, buying them and having them shipped down to the ranch.

Finally, in order to make up the order that he wanted, he had to drive back to the railroad and go further eastward; so he was gone about ten days. He paid for the cattle with checks on the bank at Crabtree, but in some instances the cattlemen rode down to Crabtree to see whether or not the checks were good before they would ship the cattle.

When Fred returned to the ranch he found the two girl visitors still with Evelyn, and learned from them that they were willing to stay out there just as long as Evelyn wished them to.

"You haven't gotten tired of the ranch yet?" he asked.

"No, indeed. We never enjoyed ourselves better away from home in our lives. Mr. Olcott and Evelyn are undoubtedly the finest musicians we ever heard. That piano is a grand instrument, and every evening, when the weather is fine, the cowboys dance in the yard to their playing; and, Mr. Fearnot, I really believe that every horse and cow and pig and chicken on the ranch is in love with Evelyn Olcott, while she has such influence over the cowboys that I believe she could make them do murder at her command."

Fred laughed and said:

"Yes, she has that same influence over me, too."

The girls looked at Evelyn and laughed, and she remarked:

"Didn't I tell you that every sort of animal is susceptible to kindness?"

"Why, do you mean to call Mr. Fearnot an animal?"

"Certainly. Every man and woman is just as much an animal as a horse or cow is."

Both the girls opened their eyes wide and Evelyn and Fred and Terry laughed heartily at them.

"Why, didn't you know that man is an animal?" Fred inquired.

"No, indeed. Never heard of such a thing before in my life," and then both Fred and Terry fell to explaining the matter to them. The younger of the two sisters said they made her feel "cheap" by proving to her that she was a mere animal.

"Oh, be careful with your words. Neither of us have said that you were a mere animal," said Terry. "Man belongs to the animal kingdom just as any four-footed beast does. Generally the things that will kill any brute will also kill a man. Both have flesh and blood, eat and drink; but man is, of course, the highest grade of the animal kingdom. They are divided into different tribes, just as animals are into different species. The Caucasian is the highest type, and the grades go down from this point until we reach the bushmen of Australia, who are said to be the lowest type of mankind."

The girls were highly interested in his talk, and on the piazza and on the front steps cowboys were listening with the deepest interest.

They, too, had never thought of the subject; but Fred and Terry were very familiar with it, for they had both studied it very deeply.

A few days after Fred's return from his trip, during which he had bought another thousand head of cattle, the cattle began arriving.

Then Fred and Terry and the cowboys were all very busy. The cars were run down to the stockpen, where they were unloaded and turned loose into their new home. Many of them were evidently very hungry, and had probably been kept penned up for several days before the cars which were to bring them down were sent up for them.

"By George, Terry," said Fred, "that lot of cattle is almost starved. The ranchmen didn't feed them while keeping them penned up waiting for the train."

"Yes, and they ought to be made to pay for it, Fred."

"Oh, what's the use? They'll soon pick up on this ranch, but really I think they ought to be punished for their heartlessness. Just because they were sold they wouldn't give them any extra feed."

The girls came down and saw the cattle leave the cars and run down the gangway that led into the stockpen, from which they passed hurriedly into the ranch.

Evelyn had seen cattle shipped and unloaded before, but her two visitors had not, so they stood and watched the process of unloading for several hours.

"Fred," said Terry, after seeing several carloads of the cattle turned out, "I think that, on an average, they are a very fine lot of cattle."

"Well, I tried to be careful, Terry, and I am glad I was, for there were quite a number who tried to pan off poor cattle on me. Their brand is already registered, just the same as ours. Of course, their calves we will have to put our registered brand on, and after a while we will have to add it to the brand of the original owners."

The addition another thousand cattle to the ranch made a pretty good display.

Both Fred and Terry made a careful count of every beef that arrived. They both rather suspected that they would come up a little short, but to their very great gratification every carload panned out according to the bill.

They were all of the long-horned species, and some of them were very large. The train was run on a sidetrack, and as fast as the cars were emptied they were moved further down the sidetrack until every car had been emptied.

"Oh, my, Fred!" said Evelyn, "surely some of those cattle must have been hurt, crowded as they were in those cars, with such long horns."

A careful inspection was made and not one was found to be seriously hurt. Fred had stipulated with the ranchmen whom he had bought from that only a given number should be placed in a car, and Superintendent Westervelt had warned the employees of the road not to exceed the limit.

That night Fred and Terry rode all around the enclosed part of the range on the lookout for wolves, and also to let the cowboys see that they were expected to do their work faithfully.

The new cattle grazed incessantly, but nothing occurred during the night to start an alarm among them. The majority of them, as dark set in, laid down to sleep or to chew their cud.

The two boys turned in at about two o'clock in the morning.

The next day one of the cowboys came in and reported that somebody down at the lower end of the ranch had cut out a complete panel of the barbed wire, thus leaving a wide gap for the cattle to go through.

Fred and Terry hurried down there on their horses with their Winchesters, accompanied by two of their most expert and faithful cowboys and made a thorough investigation.

They could see the tracks of three men, who had probably cut the wires; but they were unable to find the trail of any cattle passing through the gap. In fact, none of the cattle had done any grazing that far down.

They sent a cowboy back up to the ranch-house and had him bring down a coil of wire and the necessary tools to connect it with the wires that had been cut, and when that was done they detailed one-half of their force to watch the line of the fence at that end of the ranch during the following night.

They taught them a series of signals, which must be given and answered before firing at any one.

"Now, boys," said Fred, "be careful. We don't want any innocent man hurt, but if you find any one tampering with the fence give him a chance to cut just one wire to establish his guilt and then call a halt. If he doesn't hold up open fire on him, and keep firing until he comes down. Both Olcott and I will be moving about the greater part of the night. We want all cattle thieves to understand that they can't steal any of our cattle with impunity."

That night, after singing and playing at the house with the girls, the boys mounted their horses and started for the lower end of the ranch.

When they reached there they dismounted, hitched their horses in the timber and started down the line on foot. They found the cowboys that they had stationed along the line in their respective places. They were very prompt in exchanging signals, and they spoke in whispers so that their voices might not be overheard.

By and by in the starlight they saw about a score of cattle going through the grass as though they were being driven by somebody.

Fred and Terry crouched down in the grass and watched them.

They both became fully satisfied that some one was driving them, and they ran along with the cattle in order to ascertain where they were going, and why. They were very near the corner of the fence, for, as the reader doubtless remembers, they had enclosed only twenty of the forty thousand acres, as they thought that was about as much as they would have need for inside of the next two years.

Suddenly Terry tapped Fred on the shoulder and whispered:

"Down, Fred," and Fred dropped down on his knees.

Terry motioned with his hand and pointed out on his right where they could both see the figures of two men moving cautiously and closely behind the cattle, and they both wondered if another panel of the wire had not been cut just ahead of them.

Suddenly one of the cattle turned in their direction, and one of the men ran around to head him off. He ran almost over Fred, who sprang up and dealt him a blow on the side of his head that caused him to sink down unconscious.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRED AND TERRY CAPTURE CATTLE THIEVES.

Terry heard the blow that Fred gave the cattle thief and he knew what it meant, for the fellow sank down without uttering a word.

The thief's pal, seeing that the cow that had strayed off was not being turned around, went to the assistance of his confederate and he ran up against Terry.

Terry rose up and gave him a crack on the head with his heavy revolver. He saw more stars than he probably ever thought had a home in the skies, and down he dropped.

"Now, Terry," whispered Fred, "let's see if there are any more of them," and as quick as possible they bound the two unconscious thieves hands and feet and continued to follow the cattle.

They walked straight up on their feet, knowing that the confederates, if there were any, would mistake them for their pals if they saw them.

After a few minutes they saw two other fellows advancing toward them, and one of them came up to Fred and asked in a low tone of voice:

"What's the matter?"

"Only this," said Fred, smashing him in the face with his revolver and sending him tumbling over in the grass. The other fellow stopped and, suspecting something wrong, started to run.

"Halt!" said Terry, "or you're a dead man."

The fellow threw himself down in the grass and tried to run on his hands and knees and thus escape any bullet that might be flied at him, but Terry was on him in a moment and gave him a terrible crack with his revolver on his head.

Terry searched him for a weapon and found an ugly-looking knife and a revolver on him. He took possession of the weapons and, with the ball of twine he had with him, bound him hard and fast, his hands behind him and his ankles together, and then ran on ahead of the cattle to look for the gap he suspected they were headed for, he soon found it.

Before a single beef had passed through he and Fred turned the cattle back.

Then both of them followed the trail of the thieves, which they were enabled to do, dark though it was, by following the disarranged tall grass.

They found all of the men had recovered consciousness except the fourth man, who, was lying where he had fallen like a dead man.

"Terry," said Fred, "this is your man. What in thunder did you crack him so hard for?"

"I wanted to make sure of him," and they proceeded to drag the men to the gap that had been cut through the wire fence, took them through it, stood them up against a tree, for there were a few scattering trees growing down there, and tied them to the trunk hard and fast.

They both struck matches and held them up before their faces to see if they could recognize them, but they had never seen them before.

One of them, fearing that he would be recognized, very promptly blew out the light and muttered something in Spanish, so from that Fred and Terry judged that they were Mexicans—one, at least—and Fred took Terry aside and whispered to him that there must be other men

mixed up in it; so they concluded to build a fire some ten feet off from them and then go back inside the enclosure and conceal themselves in the grass to watch, for they knew that nobody could go up to the tree to release the men tied there without being seen by the light of the fire.

The fire was built up against an old dead log, which, being dry and well seasoned, burned readily, and in some places blazed up some ten feet or more high. Some of the cowboys, seeing the light of the fire a half mile away, came down to see what it meant.

Fred and Terry recognized them and they waited to watch their movements. One of them went up and talked with one of the men who was bound to the tree.

Both of them suspected their loyalty, but they proved to be true.

They looked around to find Fred and Terry, and several times used the signals that Fred had given them.

When Fred and Terry returned their signals they came toward them, looking carefully for them.

When they found them one of them asked:

"Boss, did you tie up those fellows?"

"Yes," said Terry, "and there's another one lying back there in the grass with a broken head, but all the same we tied him by his hands and feet to keep him from getting away."

Just then they heard the man groaning and calling to his pals, and the two cowboys followed the sound of his voice and soon found him, he having recovered consciousness. They picked him up and brought him down near the fire.

There all four of them denied that they had done anything wrong.

Each claimed that he had nothing to do with cutting out the wire, denied that he was driving the cattle and, of course, claimed to be innocent of any wrong-doing.

"Well," said Fred, "I hope you will be able to prove your innocence in court, for that is where you are going."

Then Fred turned on the two cowboys and asked them why they had left that corner of the ranch unguarded.

"Boss," one of them said, "there wasn't enough of us to reach down so far, and we thought that it would be safe to let it alone and to-morrow report it, but as soon as we saw the light we came down to investigate it."

Both of them thought that that excuse was reasonable, and Fred told them that they were expected to be vigilant in the discharge of their work and that they would employ more cowboys.

"Now you two can lie down here and sleep while we keep watch."

"Boss, we'll watch while you sleep," was the reply.

"No, we are going to keep watch ourselves. At daylight I want one of you to make your way back to the barn and hitch up a team, bring down a coil of wire and the necessary tools to repair this gap and then take the prisoners back to town.

"Fred," said Terry, "why not tell them to bring a coil of rope."

"What do you want with a rope, Terry?"

"Oh, Judge Lynch always has use for a rope for cattle thieves. I will act as sheriff, if you don't wish to have anything to do with it. Generally I am opposed to lynching, but this is a fair case."

"No, Terry, I don't believe in that. I'm sorry that, instead of capturing them, we didn't shoot them and thus get rid of them without calling in Judge Lynch."

The prisoners, of course, heard every word that the boys uttered. The fact is, they were both talking for their benefit. The cowboys, though, thought that they were in earnest and they would see a lynching, so when the dawn of day began to appear in the east Fred sent one of the cowboys back to the barn with instructions to bring down a coil of barb wire and a coil of rope.

One of the prisoners, tied to the tree, begged that Mr. Fearnot would come up to the tree and let him talk with him.

Fred did so, and the fellow said that if he wouldn't punish him and would release him, he would leave the country and never show up there again.

"Oh, yes; but it is bad policy to let a cattle thief go loose, after he has been caught in the act."

Then the others began making similar promises, and never did men beg for their lives as hard as they did.

One of the cowboys was sent off for wire and rope, and while he was gone a farmer came by, making an early start for Crabtree.

The road passed within a couple of hundred yards of where the men were tied to the tree, and he heard them talking as well as noticed the smoke from the fire which Fred and Terry had built out there.

He left his team in the road, and coming into the woods, there learned the whole secret of the situation.

He knew Fred and Terry, for he had frequently stopped at their ranch, so he, on his way to town, notified every farmer and ranchman whom he passed that Fearnot and Olcott were going to hang four cattle thieves down at the lower end of their ranch.

Everybody who heard the news wanted to see the lynching, so they came down there. Fred told them that he had no idea of taking the law in his own hands, and that he intended taking the prisoners into town and turning them over to the sheriff. All the prisoners, being Mexicans, whom the farmers throughout that section hated like poison, stood in great danger of being hanged at once by the angry ranchmen; but Fred refused to permit it. He bargained with one of them to take them in his wagon to Crabtree, and then mounted his horse and started off ahead of them. They were bound hard and fast, so they could give the farmer no trouble.

"Terry," said he before he left, "you must see to the careful repairing of the fence and keep a watch over everything. I am going to see if I can find a good electrician to come out and electrify the wires in this fence, so when they attempt to cut this fence again some of them will get knocked off the face of the earth." So he put spurs to his horse and started off. He knew he could reach Crabtree about two hours ahead of the prisoners.

The party of rough fellows, farmers and cowboys, went along with the wagon, and before they had gone three miles they took the prisoners from the farmer and strung them up in some timber along the roadside; so when the farmer reached Crabtree he had no prisoners, and he told a harrowing tale to Fred of how the men had taken the prisoners from him and strung them up.

"Well, well, well," he ejaculated. "I am sorry for that; not that I don't think they deserved it, but I don't believe in that sort of thing. Now, I want you to come with me to the sheriff and several responsible citizens and tell that story to them, for I don't want to be accused of having anything to do with the matter, other than capturing the thieves."

The farmer told his story to the sheriff, which official, accompanied by several citizens, as well as some deputies, rode down there to investigate the matter.

Meanwhile Fred went in search of an electrician. There was only one in the city, and he had charge of the city electrical lighting, so he couldn't go down to the ranch and electrify the wires around the entire range, for it wouldn't do to perform that feat unless some one was left in charge of the city's plant.

Fred bargained with him to communicate with some competent electrician in some other city and get him to come down to the ranch and stay for one month, saying that he would pay him well for his services.

Fred rode down the other road that ran parallel with the railroad track, reaching home, after hard riding, a little after dark.

Early the next morning when Fred went to the store he found some four or five cowboys who had just arrived, having come in to put in applications for employment as cowboys.

Said a big, brawny fellow, who measured six feet and two inches in height:

"Mr. Fearnot, we hear that you have added a thousand more cattle to your herd, and we know that you need more cowboys. We are all trained ranchmen and cowboys, and understand the business from A to Z. Just set us to work at once, and there'll be no more cattle thieving around here, for we know just how to deal with them."

Fred did not like the looks of any one in the party. Their faces showed plainly that they were certainly devotees of the jug, so he said:

"Gentlemen, of course we will need more cowboys, for it is our intention to add still another thousand head of cattle to our herd; but we really can't employ another man until we first investigate his former life. We don't want any man in our employ who drinks whisky. Neither Mr. Olcott nor myself ever touch the stuff, and I never took a drink of anything intoxicating in my life, so I don't want any one around me who does."

"Well," said the big fellow, "I never was drunk in my life, I have taken whisky moderately whenever I felt like it ever since I was of age, so if you give me a job I'll agree never to take a

drink as long as I am on the place."

But Fred could see from his eyes and face that the man was not telling the truth.

He said that if Fred would write to certain ranchmen further up the road where he had worked that he would find out that he was as good a ranchman as could be found anywhere in the State; but Fred shook his head and remarked that he would take his time, and that he and Olcott would act as cowboys themselves until they had selected others to do the work for them.

About three hours later a cowboy arrived in the conductor's cab, on the rear end of a freight train, and going to the little store, inquired for Fearnot.

There were four cowboys in the store at the time, and they could see from his dress and style that the newcomer was a cowboy, too.

The storekeeper went out on the porch and caught a glimpse of Fred over at the barn lot. He gave a halloo, which attracted Fred's attention, and then he beckoned to him. Fred at once started for the store, but the newcomer, who had followed the storekeeper out on the piazza, saw him and said:

"Thank you, boss; I know him. I used to work for him up in Colorado, and he is one of the best men that ever breathed."

When Fred was within one hundred yards of the store, he recognized the cowboy, and called to him:

"Hello, Tom!" and the newcomer returned his greeting.

When Fred reached the store, the two shook hands heartily.

"Tom, what in the world brought you way down here?" Fred inquired.

"Mr. Fearnot. I came down here to take my old place with you on the ranch, if you need me."

"All right, Tom, you can have it. You are just the kind of a man that I do need."

Just then Terry came up and another handshaking took place between the cowboy and him.

Terry and Tom seemed to be highly pleased at meeting each other.

When Tom learned that Evelyn was down there he exclaimed:

"Good heavens, Mr. Terry, I want to see her, and get down on my knees to her, for if there ever was an angel on earth, she is that one."

Both Fred and Terry laughed, and the latter informed him that here were two other young ladies down there from Crabtree.

"Look here, boss," said Tom, "I heard up at Crabtree that four cattle thieves had been strung up down here yesterday. Is that so?"

"Yes, Tom; but we had nothing to do with that part of the affair."

The other cowboys were standing at the other end of the porch, and heard Fred engage the newcomer, and that, too, after refusing to employ any of them. Their faces showed plainly their disgust, and not to say dissatisfaction, and the big six-foot fellow went up to Fred and again applied for employment, saying that he couldn't find a better cowboy in the whole State than he was, and that he could get references to prove it.

"See here, my friend," said Fred, "you may be all that you claim, and I hope that you are: but really I want to be convinced of that fact before I take you on our force."

"Boss, set me to work at once, and you needn't pay me a cent until after you learn that I am all that I claim to be."

"No, sir. A man can't work ten minutes for me without pay; so just leave your address here at the store, and I'll notify you if I want you."

"Why, boss, you have just taken on a new man, and that, too, after refusing to employ any of those in my party. Do you call that fair play?"

"Yes, for I know this man personally. He has been in my employ before, and I was satisfied with his work."

The fellow turned away, growing threateningly and the party went inside the store, and there held a consultation.

Tom and Fred and Terry went over to the house, where the ladies were, and Evelyn, as soon as she saw him, recognized him, and exclaimed:

"Why, there's Tom Hecker."

Tom instantly doffed his hat and stood, bowing and smiling, as if highly pleased at her recognition of him.

"Tom," said she, advancing out on the piazza, "come here; I want to shake hands with you, for you were of great service to me on several occasions up in Colorado."

Tom advanced, too, and she extended her hand to him.

He appeared to be supremely happy. She didn't, of course, introduce him to the two young ladies, for she resented their social positions. But she did remark to them, in his hearing, that he was one of her brother's most faithful cowboys on the old Colorado ranch, and that he was as brave as he was faithful.

She asked Tom when he had seen Wicklow and his wife, and he replied that he hadn't seen them for over a month, that the old force had been pretty well scattered, and that the old ranch had been divided up into three ranches, as three different individuals had bought it.

He said, though, that when last he saw the Wicklow family they were all well.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE COWBOY WHO INSISTED ON WORK OR FIGHT.

Fred called up one of his cowboys, introduced Hecker to him, and informed him that he was henceforth to be one of the force of cowboys, as he had been in his employ up in Colorado, and was a good fellow, trustworthy, and not afraid of either cattle thieves or long-horned cattle.

"Now, take him around to the stables and barns, and all the lots, and let him see everything on the place."

"All right, boss," and he and Tom went off together. Of course, Hecker had no end of questions to answer, for the Texas cowboy was more or less puzzled to understand his present employer.

Of course, Tom told him that Fearnot and Olcott were the best and bravest men whom he had ever known, and that the man who undertook to buck against them made the mistake of his life.

Fred and Terry then busied themselves about other matters, which had been called to their attention.

Terry suggested the feasibility of buying at least a thousand head of sheep and fencing off a portion of the ranch for their use.

They were talking over that when word was sent to them that dinner was ready. They went over to the house and found that Evelyn and the two girls, with the old black cook, who had been employed in Crabtree, had prepared a most savory meal, and they at once sat down to it.

They were about through with their meal, when they heard loud talking and the tramping of feet, and the next moment the door leading into the dining-room was burst in, and the big cowboy whose application for employment had been refused, stalked into the room, waving a branding iron over his head in a most ferocious manner.

The two young lady visitors sprang up, and rushing into the other room shut the door. But Evelyn knew that there could be no safer place for her than with Fred and Terry.

When she saw the big fellow with that formidable weapon in his hands she paled somewhat, and thought that Fred and her brother were in danger of being badly hurt, if not killed.

The man had evidently been drinking heavily, for his face was flushed.

"Mr. Fearnot," he fairly roared, "you refused to give me work this morning, and yet an hour later you took on another man. Now I've got to have work or know the reason why, or else clean out the whole ranch!" and he flourished the branding-iron above his head in a most threatening manner.

"It's work or fight," he continued. "Which shall it be?"

Terry had his rifle hanging on a couple of pegs at the rear end of the kitchen, and he started for it.

Fred had bought, up in Crabtree, a few weeks before, a bulldog, which he was training for his own use, and the dog had come into the dining-room and sat in a place that had been assigned him in expectation of being fed when the dinner was finished.

As the burly cowboy burst open the door and rushed into the dining-room, brandishing a

branding-iron above his head, and threatening dire destruction to everybody present, Fred dashed at him, and seized his upraised arm, while Terry reached for his rifle.

The burly cowboy aimed a blow at Fred's head with the branding-iron, but Fred reached up and caught him by the wrist, while the dog ran around and attacked him in the rear.

The fellow evidently thought that it would be an easy matter to jerk loose from Fred's grip, but to his amazement he found that his grip was like that of a steel vise, and to save his life he couldn't pull loose from him.

Fred held him steadily, and with his left fist dealt him a blow on the right side of his chest.

Terry then ran up with his Winchester, holding it rather menacingly.

"Let him alone, Terry," said Fred, "I'll attend to him."

Fred then gave him three or four blows while the fellow kept jerking and twisting to try to free himself, after a while giving vent to fierce imprecations and at the same time trying to avoid the fangs of the bulldog.

Fred then began pushing the villain back toward the door, through which he had entered.

Seeing that he couldn't use the branding-iron on Fred, he tried to take it in his left hand for that purpose, but Fred's left interfered, and the fellow felt as though his right arm would be broken.

Fred, pushed him out of the door, and he lost his balance as he went through, and so fell to the ground.

As the man fell to the ground, just outside the door, the branding-iron slipped from his hand. Then Fred jerked him up to his feet, and went at him like a cyclone. Four or five blows on the chest caused him to go down again.

Again Fred jerked the fellow up on his feet, and the second time beat him down, until the fellow didn't have breath enough left in him to say anything.

Fred let him lie there for about one minute, and then said:

"You wanted work or fight. I'll give you all the fight you want and charge you nothing for it," and as soon as the fellow tried slowly to get up, Fred dealt him another blow that laid him out for about five minutes.

Hearing that the fight had ceased, Evelyn entered the other room to assure the girls that Fred and Terry could take care of the fellow, again came out, and looked at the scene going on outside.

"Brother," said she, "you are not going to kill him, are you?"

"No, I'm just going to let Fred manage him in his own way."

"Fred," she asked, "what are you going to do to him?"

"Go into the house, dear, and quiet those girls. I'm not going to shed any blood or take a life."

She didn't follow his injunctions to go into the house, but she kept quiet a while and watched them.

"Fred, have you killed him?" she asked presently, as she saw the man lying like a dead man on the ground.

"No; I knocked him out, though, and am waiting for him to get his breath back."

By and by the fellow began to breathe hard and groan.

Finally he opened his eyes and looked up at Fred.

"You wanted fight or work," said Fred. "What do you want now?"

"Mister, I want to go as far away from here as I can."

"Well, why didn't you go when you had the chance?"

"Boss, I didn't know you then; but I do now."

"Well, get up and leave, and don't you waste a minute of time in getting away."

The fellow got up and started off in the direction of the store.

His three companions had retreated to that place, and as soon as he started, Fred followed

him and assisted him in leaving by administering kicks which raised him from the ground at least a foot at every kick.

Suddenly he drew a revolver from his pocket. It was strange that he hadn't attempted to use it before.

He drew it and turned to face Fred; but just then Fred saw the weapon and kicked it out of his hand.

"Oh you're not satisfied yet? You wanted to shoot, eh? Now, I'll show you what shooting is," and he sent Terry into the house to get his revolver and an apple.

There were a few green apples in the kitchen, which the cook intended to stew that afternoon.

Terry came out with one of the apples in one hand and the revolver in the other.

"Now, my good fellow, you take that apple and hold it between your thumb and forefinger. Hold it out straight at arm's length, while I send a bullet through it."

"Boss, I can't hold it."

"All right. If you don't hold it between your thumb and forefinger I'll shoot at your hand."

"Boss, why don't you let me go? I've got enough, and I'll leave the State."

"Hold out that apple," said Fred.

The man held the apple out at arm's length between his thumb and forefinger, but his hand was trembling so that Fred had to be very careful for fear that he would hit the hand and thus maim him for life: but the bullet went square through the apple, and it fell to the ground.

The fellow nearly had a fit. He picked up the pieces of the apple and looked at them.

"Now you want to leave this locality about as fast as your heels can carry you," said Fred.

With that the fellow, without stopping to pick up his hat, turned around and left, and all he would say to his companions was:

"Come, boys, let's get away from here. This is no place for us."

He stopped at the well, took a dipper full of water, and then started off, while the other three followed him.

That big cowboy was never seen in that part of Texas afterward.

The storekeeper told the story to his customers as they came into the store, and it was soon known all over that county.

The facts of the lynching of the four Mexican cattle thieves had been published all over that part of the State, and Fred and Terry were relieved from the odium of having had anything to do with the affair, other than the capture of the men.

The sheriff and his deputies took charge of the bodies, as they were found hanging to the trees, and buried them by the road-side.

They were buried in one pit, and above them was a head-board, on which was painted in large letters the story of their fate.

Tom Hecker had written to four of his former cowboy companions that he had found a place with Fearnot and Olcott again, and that they wanted four more of them to join him.

They at once resigned their places with their employers, and soon reached their ranch.

They were each supplied with a Winchester and cartridges, and told to capture every cattle thief that they found on the range, even if they had to bring them down with a bullet.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

As the news spread around through the county of Fred's having shot an apple from the fingers of another man, it seemed so incredible that scores of people came to the cowboys to inquire as to the truth of the story.

One day, when Tom was sent to town with a wagon to bring back some things that Fred had ordered, he told a story at the depot, when a man challenged him to prove it. He said that he had seen Mr. Olcott fire at a tree with his revolver at a distance of thirty paces, and then plant the

rest of the bullets in the weapon in the same hole in the tree.

Said the townsman:

"I've got a hundred dollars, which says that that is not so. That no such thing ever happened."

"Well," said Tim, "I haven't got one hundred dollars, for I don't carry my money with me wherever I go; but I will have to come up again on Saturday, and I will see if I can get Mr. Olcott to come up with me and prove it to you by shooting for you." 7

"All right," said the man. "I will meet you here, and put up the money, and I will bet one hundred dollars that Mr. Olcott can't plant all the bullets in his revolver in the same hole at a distance of thirty paces, and if you want to make another bet, I'll bet ten dollars that Mr. Olcott won't undertake it."

"That's a go," said Tom, "Just meet me here on Saturday, and I will bring up my money ready to bet any amount that I can get you to put up that he can do it."

When he went home Tom told Terry of the bet that he had made.

"Now, Mr. Olcott, I haven't got much money, but I'll put up every cent I have on your marksmanship, and I beg you, as a favor, to go with me on Saturday and give me a chance to win that bet, for I need it, as I am engaged to a girl up at Ranchman's Rest, whom I want to marry just as soon as I can get money enough ahead to build a little home for her."

"All right. Tom. I'll help you out. I'll go up with you, and if that fellow or any other man wants to bluff you, I'll check enough out of the bank for you to cover whatever he or his friends may put up."

The next Saturday Terry went up to Crabtree, going on a freight train cab, Tom drove a wagon, for there was no local freight train running that day down to the ranch.

The fact is, only through freights ran over the road at that section, hence none of the cars were unlocked at the ranch. Of course, Terry had his faithful revolver with him, and when Tom arrived, the sporting men got around him and challenged him to show his money.

"All right, sir. Mr. Olcott has agreed to shoot, and I am ready to cover any amount you want to put up, unless you have put up more than I have."

The original bettor offered to put up three hundred dollars.

"All right," said Tom. "I'll cover that."

Then several others put up one and two hundred each.

Terry had given Tom a check for one thousand dollars, and Tom hurried off to the bank with it, cashed it, and covered all the bets.

The depot agent acted as stakeholder.

Then they went about a quarter of a mile up the road into a piece of timber, where thirty paces were stepped off, and a piece of white paper, about an inch square, was fastened, against the tree.

One man carried a sharp axe with him, saying that he was not going to let any trick be played on him.

"It's easy enough," said he, "for one shot to be fired in the tree and the other shots just to be blank cartridges."

Terry then fired the first shot, and every man in the party went to the tree to look at the bullet hole.

Then Terry fired the other live shots with cool deliberation and caution.

When the whole six bullets had been fired no one could tell, from the appearance of the bullet hole, that any other bullet had hit the tree.

The man with the axe proceeded to cut into the tree in quest of the bullets, and the whole six bullets were found, one on top of the other.

When they came back the report was that six bullets were shot into the first bullet hole and were found when the chips were cut out.

On that the men paid the thousand dollars to Tom, whose enthusiasm was so great that he was ready to risk the whole amount by offering to bet two to one that Olcott could shoot an apple from his head with that revolver at a distance of one hundred yards.

But the party of bettors had had enough. They didn't care to risk any more money and some

of them couldn't afford to lose a hundred dollars; but firmly believing that they would win, they had borrowed a little to make up that amount.

Evelyn and her two visiting friends agreed to go up to Crabtree and stand up with Tom and his girl when they were married.

The girl lost no time in leaving Ranchman's Rest for Crabtree, and when she arrived there Fred and Terry recognized her as a girl they had often seen, without knowing who she was. They greeted her kindly, and so did Evelyn, saying she remembered her face well, and within thirty minutes after she arrived in Crabtree they were married in the parlor of the hotel at Crabtree, with Fred and Evelyn standing up with them, and quite a bevy of young ladies acting as maids of honor.

Terry paid for the dinner of the couple at the hotel, after which they went out to the wagon that was to carry her trunk, and Tom and she drove to the ranch by themselves, while Evelyn and the girls returned in the ranch carriage.

Fred and Terry and Jack went down on the conductor's caboose of the freight train.

Thus Fred and Terry managed their new ranch by giving the strictest personal attention to every little matter of importance.

They made it a rule to deal justly and kindly with every man in their employ, and thus gained their confidence.

By and by the Crabtree Herald published a statement that the fattest cattle in the whole State of Texas were to be found on the ranch of Fearnot and Olcott, and soon applications from cattle firms way up in Kansas City, Omaha and Chicago began coming to them, the firms asking for particulars. Terry and Fred knew every one of their correspondents.

They wrote back to them, however, that it was not their intention to sell but a limited number of their cattle that fall; but every one of the firms wrote back to them, saying that they would take their word as to the condition of the cattle that they had for sale, and would pay the highest market price for them.

Some of the firms offered to go down at once, although it was some two or three months ahead of the regular season for buying cattle, pick them out, and pay a cash deposit, contracting to pay the market price when the cattle were ready for sale, and that each beef was to be weighed at the depot.

Jack said that he would have a few hundred head for sale, while Fred and Terry had over five hundred.

Jack finished his big house, and at once proceeded to furnish it.

Evelyn looked after that part of it for him, so, while he went North after his mother and sweetheart Evelyn attended to the furnishing of his home, and all of his cowboys were instructed to obey whatever orders either Mr. Olcott or Mr. Fearnot might give.

Jack wanted Evelyn to go up with him, but she wrote to Mary Hamilton to go down to New York City and act as bridesmaid for Katy Malone.

Next week's issue will contain "FRED FEARNOT AND THE LARIAT THROWER; OR, BEATING THE CHAMPION OF THE WEST."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRED FEARNOT'S NEW RANCH ***

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