



A Splendid Story of the West, Showing How an English Lad Proved His Mettle

Illustrated by Ernest Ibbetson

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Fun for the Cowpunchers!

"LET 'er go, Jimmy! Hang on! What are your teeth for? Wow! Whoop-oe! Gosh! He's off again!"

The compound of the Lazy B Ranch was lively just at that moment. Seven of the toughest cowpunchers it would be possible to assemble in the whole length and breadth of Wyoming were having a little relaxation, were indulging in a little of the sport that will never pall on cowpunchers as long as there are cows left to punch.

Or, in other words, they were "roasting" their pet tenderfoot, these "boys" of the Lazy B. Not every ranch was lucky enough to have a tenderfoot to haze. But the Lazy B had one. And he was amusing them now by trying to stick on to a horse that certainly was well-known as a bad case. Or, rather, he had been trying to stick on. It was no use trying now; for Jimmy Deane had been shot right out of the saddle, and was just now sprawling on hands and knees, face dark with rage, teeth gritting together with mortification.

"Who told ye to dismount?" grinned old Dan Fitch, the foreman of the Lazy B.

"Oh, go to Putney!" snapped Jimmy

Deane, coming to his feet and examining his hands, which had been scratched considerably in his fall from the broncho that had so neatly bucked him off.

"Don't be riled, son," jeered Slick Spicer, a cowpuncher of not much more than Jimmy's age. "Guess ye ought to be glad to keep seven punchers from dying of ongwyl Gee! What 'ud we do without our tenderfoot to amuse us? Likin' the country any better, Jimmy?"

Deane clenched his fists, and strode up to this tall, lanky young puncher.

"I hate your beastly country!" he said. Those who heard him laughed, for had not Jimmy Deane said he hated the Wild West on an average once a day since arriving here at the Lazy B? "And when I see bounders like you grinning, it makes me hate the people that are in it, too!"

He gazed challengingly at Slick Spicer as he spoke.

"Gosh! I believe the kid wants to fight Slick!" the foreman exclaimed. "Say, this won't do! Can't have no bad blood here on this yer ranch. Say, kid, quit that!"

"I've got to give somebody a hiding, just to ease my feelings," said Jimmy fiercely. "You've had your bit of fun out of me, and

I'm going to get a bit out of some of you in exchange!"

But Slick Spicer evidently did not like the idea of standing up to this angry-eyed young Britisher. He took a backwards step, pulled out his gun, and fingered the chamber of it.

"With guns, if you like!" he said. "Guess I ain't no great hand with my fists. Worst of you blessed Britishers is——"

"All right, then," said Jimmy; and, ignoring the gun held by his tormentor, walked up to Slick and gave him a light, open-handed blow on the cheek. "Now will you fight? I'm sick of you, like I'm sick of this beastly country."

Slick's face was twisted with rage now. He advanced on the tenderfoot until the muzzle of his revolver was digging into Jimmy Deane's ribs. Deane looked him right in the eye and laughed at him.

"Oh, go ahead with it!" he said. "Just like they do on the pictures! You and your

beastly gun! Blaze away—you windbag! That's about the only thing out here that is thorough—the bluff of you cowpunching bounders, who couldn't——"

"Take him away!" shouted Slick Spicer, fairly dancing with rage now. "Take him away before I hurt him. Ye knows what a rale bad man I am when I'm roused!"

"Bah!" said Jimmy; and shot out a hand with the speed of light, seized Slick's wrist, and gave it an upwards jerk.

The revolver, its trigger pressed quite involuntarily by its owner, exploded noisily. Another twist Jimmy gave, and the gun dropped to the ground. The tenderfoot kicked it well away. Then he gave Slick a thrust that sent him staggering.

"You've had all your own way with me up to now," said Jimmy, and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. "Just because I was green at everything you could do. I've tried to ride your screws of horses. I've mucked out your stables and corrals for you. I've taken all your



Jimmy Deane, the tenderfoot, was amusing the boys of the Lazy B Ranch by trying to stick on a horse that was well known as a bad case. (See previous page.)

funny remarks. Now you're going to take something from me—something that I can do pretty well—or they used to say so!”

And he sprang forward. Lightly enough, he struck Slick Spicer on the face. Several times he struck the lanky cowpuncher, who, at first, covered himself up and shouted protests. Then, when Slick seemed to realise that this worm had turned in grim earnest, he cast a beseeching glance about him at his interested comrades, and tried to put up some sort of a fight.

It was a poor fight, though. A man who has been practically born with a six-shooter in his hand, who has spent all his life practising speed on the draw, and has never thought about defending himself by other means than his gun, is generally at a loss when unexpectedly deprived of his weapon and set face to face with a fellow who has a more natural means of offence, that he can use with skill.

The six who watched this affair muttered amongst themselves. Twice old Dan, the foreman, stepped towards the fighting pair, as though to stop them. And, after his second attempt, Jimmy deliberately struck this over-smart young puncher a blow in the face that sent him thudding to the ground, then, while Slick was blinking up skywards, turned and addressed the others.

“Fine sports, aren't you?” he asked. “Would you want to butt in if I'd agreed to fight this bounder with guns! I don't think you would! Well, you let me alone here. I'll go through the whole mob of you when I've finished this one!”

Slick Spicer, if a very unskilful fist-fighter, was not lacking in pluck, it seemed, for he brought himself to his feet and rushed at the tenderfoot, head low, fists flying. Remorselessly, Jimmy hit him again and sent him to earth a second time. Nor could Slick bring one of his fists within a foot of Jimmy's face or body.

At length, just as there came to the ears of the murmuring spectators the sound of horses' feet and the rattling of a buggy's wheels, Jimmy felled Slick a third time; and that was enough for the cowpuncher, who, a thoroughly beaten man, came rockily to his feet and

moved off over towards the bunkhouse and the water-pail.

“Now,” said Jimmy, breathing hard, but advancing, bright-eyed, on Pieface Walters, whose fingers also itched towards his gun. “I think I'll teach you next!”

“Hallo, there!” came the hail from a buggy that had just pulled up in the compound, “What's all the trouble?” And Frank Cooper, the wealthy young owner of the Lazy B Ranch, alighted and walked on the scene. “Scrapping, eh?”

“Yes,” said Jimmy fiercely. “I've just licked one of 'em, and I'm going through the whole lot, if they don't stop playing the fool with me.”

“Gosh!” murmured Cooper. “He's wakened up, I do declare.”

“Wakened up?” repeated Jimmy. “Yes, I suppose you're right, sir. I have. Been asleep too long. I hate this blinking country, and the last five months here didn't make me like it any better, but——”

“Arizona!” called Cooper; and a man who had ridden with him in the buggy came strolling over towards the party.

Jimmy Deane was still angry, still thought he had a lot of things to get off his chest. But he could not help staring in amazement, yet with considerable admiration, at the man Cooper had addressed as “Arizona.”

Here was a tall, athletic man of some thirty-five years of age, probably one of the best known men in that Wild Western State since the time when Buffalo Bill had been famous. He was as handsome as a god, with a finely chiselled face, a tiny, clipped moustache, and hair rather long and wavy. His dress was picturesque—almost stagey. His jacket was short, like an English schoolboy's Eton coat. He wore riding-breeches that would have made many a British hunting gentleman groan with envy, and polo-boots that were beautifully polished. His shirt was scarlet, of silk, and contrasted well with the black velvet of his coat. He wore a Stetson on his head, that had a gaudy scarf around it instead of the snake-skin band usually affected. And last but not least striking, he carried a monocle in his left eye.

"Well, Frank" asked Arizona Jim Carton, nodding to those cowpunchers present whom he knew, "wanting me?"

"Our tenderfoot's wakened up, Arizona," said Cooper, laying a hand on Jimmy Deane's shoulder. "Wasn't I saying that he needed to shake off the sulks he was living in?"

"Can't recollect," said Arizona Jim, and flashed a real heart-warming smile in Jimmy's direction.

And at once Jimmy's heart went out to this man, of whom he had heard a great deal during the months he had worked here as a tenderfoot on the Lazy B. Arizona Jim was an Indian agent—but he was more than that. Some said he had some connection with the American Secret Service as well. But he was perhaps best known of all as a helper of lame dogs over stiles. Nor did he always keep strictly within the law in his doings—if human justice could be served by his running counter to certain unscrupulous sheriffs and judges.

This man held out a hand to Jimmy, who shook it, and felt a little thrill as the Indian agent's slim, brown fingers closed over his own work-damaged hand.

"Best be honest, I suppose," Arizona said to the rancher, "and let this man know we were talking about him. I'm glad you have wakened up, lad. You've been having a thin time here, by all accounts. Well, now you are awake, stay so. You'll like this country much better than you did. And it's not a bad place."

He looked about him. Well to the west were to be seen the towering hills, some of them snow-capped, with the brilliant sunshine gleaming upon them. And nearer to them than the hills were the rolling plains, that were well dotted with cattle. And this ranch itself was picturesque enough, with its low-built house, its bunkhouse, cookhouse, barn, corrals, and windmills. Really, a healthy, adventure-loving youngster ought to have loved everything he could see here.

Dan Fitch, the foreman, muttered something to his underlings, and they all shuffled away towards the bunkhouse.

And just then Chop Suey, the Chinese cook, banged on the three feet of railroad iron that constituted the ranch's dinner-gong.

"Just a minute, Jimmy," said Frank Cooper, as Jimmy also turned to obey the dinner summons. "I want to know something about this row you seem to have been having. Come along inside."

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders; but he obeyed his boss, and entered the big ranch kitchen.

"What happened?"

asked Cooper, when they were inside.

But, with the steely blue eyes of Arizona fixed upon him, Jimmy felt some hesitation. His childish anger had departed now. Something about this Indian agent seemed to tranquillise him. There was nothing childish about Arizona Jim. He did not look as though he would throw himself easily into some puerile passion; though he looked a man who could be coldly angry when necessary; and then he would be a remarkably dangerous man.



"Oh, it was nothing," he said. "I got a bit sicker of this country."

"Why are you sick of the West, lad?" asked Arizona Jim. "Most young Britishers I know out here love it. Aren't they treating you decently here?"

"Decently enough," said Jimmy. He glanced over towards his boss, who was eyeing him with a little grin. "As decently as my uncle wants them to," he added in a sudden burst of confidence.

Then, almost before he knew it, he was unburdening his soul to this wonderful, magnetic man. Nor did he care that Cooper was listening to all he said. For the first time in five months the tenderfoot had met a man whom he instinctively knew was a friend. In those five months he had not told a soul that which was eating his heart out—yet within ten minutes of meeting Arizona Jim Carton, he was letting everything out, knowing it was all falling into sympathetic ears. Why was he out here at all? Why was he sick of the country? He told Arizona Jim everything.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Arizona's Bet!

"JUST because I made a bit of an ass of myself at home. Got expelled from a public school," he said. "And an uncle—I haven't got another relation in the world—was so fed up that he sent me out here to Cooper, to be put through the mill a bit, to get the nonsense knocked out of me. Harsh old bird, my uncle Ben! And the worst of it was, he told Cooper here all about me, and Cooper must have passed it on to the men. They've chipped me without mercy ever since I came. And they've tried all their hazing stunts on me, thinking they'll make a man of me, I suppose. But they're only making a savage of me. Making me hate the country worse than ever. Wouldn't you hate it, if you were compelled to stay out here for six months, just to be chastened, as Uncle Ben put it? Thank goodness, though, I've only got another month of it, and then I'm going back home."

"Oh, and why?" asked Arizona Jim.

"Because I was sent here for six months, and if I managed to stick on this ranch so

long, without quitting of my own accord, my uncle was to send me cash and let me get back home."

"And what'll you do there?" asked Arizona Jim.

"Oh, anything; but no more stable-cleaning, no more water-carrying and wood-splitting for a Chink," said Jimmy, getting angry again. "And I'll bet I'm not a bit chastened."

Arizona Jim turned on Cooper, who was biting his lips and frowning a little now. Evidently Arizona and this wealthy young rancher were intimate. Anyway, Arizona spoke bluntly enough to him.

"You've made a mistake, Frank," he said coolly. "You haven't given the lad a chance. You've nearly spoilt him."

"How?" asked Frank Cooper, starting.

"Give the man a horse to ride; let him go out on the range at a man's job. Let him get into the swing of life out here in Wyoming," said Arizona Jim. "Don't keep him cooped up here choring about for Chop Suey! Fancy making a white lad fag for a Chinaman! Man, man, if you think that's how to chasten a high-spirited lad, you're all wrong. By gosh! Why, life like that would sicken me of any land!"

"I—I—but," stammered Frank Cooper, "old Mostyn, this fellow's uncle—who was a pal of my father's—wanted the nonsense knocked out of him. And I got the boys to help me."

"Bah, my dear fellow!" said Arizona Jim. "You're all wrong! I wouldn't give you much to educate a son of mine. Why, your boys should be giving him the chance to show what he's made of. Anyhow, I'm glad to see Jimmy turned to-day and showed them that, though he may be green at some things, he's no slacker with his fists. Maybe that'll make the boys respect him more."

"Don't care whether they respect me or what they think of me. I'll be out of here in another month," said the tenderfoot. "And I'll not look back on Wyoming with any affection."

Arizona Jim skewered the lad with his keen gaze. He laid a hand on Jimmy's shoulder.



As Jimmy watched, the five men seized a steer and, despite its bawlings, threw it to the ground. "Branding!" muttered Jimmy. (See Chapter 3)

"Supposing I give you a chance?" he asked. "A chance, I mean, to waken up a bit more? You don't know yet what is going on in these hills, my lad. You haven't got the love for adventure into your blood, just because you've been made a drudge by mistake. Suppose I make you so that you'll not want to go back to England at the end of your six months' penance here?"

Jimmy laughed jerkily at that. For five months he had been looking forward to but one thing—to get back away from this crude country that he hated so thoroughly; to get back to England, where, anyway, if they did despise a fellow, they were usually too polite to tell him so to his face. Here men pretty well carried their hearts on their sleeves, and nobody had made any secret of the contempt they felt for this sulky tenderfoot.

"The age of miracles is past," he said.

"We're living in that age right now," retorted the Indian agent. "I'll bet you—

what shall I bet you?—that, once you've had a touch of real adventure, you'll look at life out here from an entirely different angle. Now, what shall we bet? Put yourself into my hands and I'll make a Wyoming lover of you before the month's out."

"Can't understand why you're so interested in a tenderfoot," muttered Jimmy.

He glanced at his employer, who was rubbing his clean-shaven chin thoughtfully. Plainly, Cooper was interested in Arizona's words.

"I'm interested in you because you're a youngster from England," said the Indian agent. "All up and down this State I know Britishers who're about the best sportsmen I ever met. And I don't want to meet one who—well, who lies down to things. Bad for England, isn't it? Englishmen—Britons—have the reputation of being able to shake down anywhere, mostly in less than six months. So shall we have a bet?"

Jimmy was flushed in the face now. Perhaps, he thought, he had let what he imagined to be his grudge against fate overcome him. On the other hand, he would not dispute the fact that they hadn't given him a chance to like this Wild West since his arrival. The plans of his associates all seemed to have been with another view—that of sickening him of the country.

"But I'll bet you'll never make me want to stay out here," he said. "Anyway, even if you get used to the life, it's only hard work and no prospects."

"Can you ride decently?" asked Arizona Jim.

"Can't stay long on a buckner," said Jimmy. "But I can ride an ordinary, decently behaved horse well enough, though they've never let me mount anything but an outlaw since I came here."

And again Arizona Jim glanced with disapproval at Cooper.

"I've got what is reputed to be the best horse in the West," said he. "It was given me by another Britisher—a fellow I helped called Bob Raynor. The mare's called Cleopatra. I'll bet you that horse against anything you care to risk that I'll have you make a complete change of heart before another month's gone—or else I'll know you're not worth my interest."

"If you're right," said Jimmy, "I'll work for another six months for Cooper here, without any wages. Is that the deal? I'm to be a confirmed Westerner before another month's out. If I'm not, I'm to have a horse that I sha'n't need, because I can't take it home with me. That's a funny bet."

"I'm not going to lose Cleopatra," said Arizona Jim, with a laugh. He turned to Cooper. "And when, did you say, is your kiddie coming up to the Lazy B?"

"In about three weeks' time," said Cooper. "Poor Elsie! Since her mother died, last year, she's been lonesome enough, though I did think she'd be better with an aunt down at Cheyenne than up here, with no companions. Five years old she'll be in a fortnight, and her birthday's to be the day she arrives here. She's pining down there in Cheyenne. She'll be better, I think, after all, up here amongst us menfolks. But what——"

"Say," said Arizona Jim, interrupting, "will you lend this tenderfoot of yours to me for a while?"

"Well, I was thinking," said Cooper, "of detailing a horse to him and letting him ride the range a bit for a change. I see now I have been keeping him cooped up——"

"I want him to help me in a job I've got," said Arizona Jim; and smiled in the way no man could resist.

"Oh, all right," said Cooper gruffly. "He might as well have a good time the last few weeks he's out here."

"The next few weeks are going to be the first weeks of real Western life he's ever had," said Arizona Jim. "You don't know how to train a tenderfoot, Frank."

THE THIRD CHAPTER

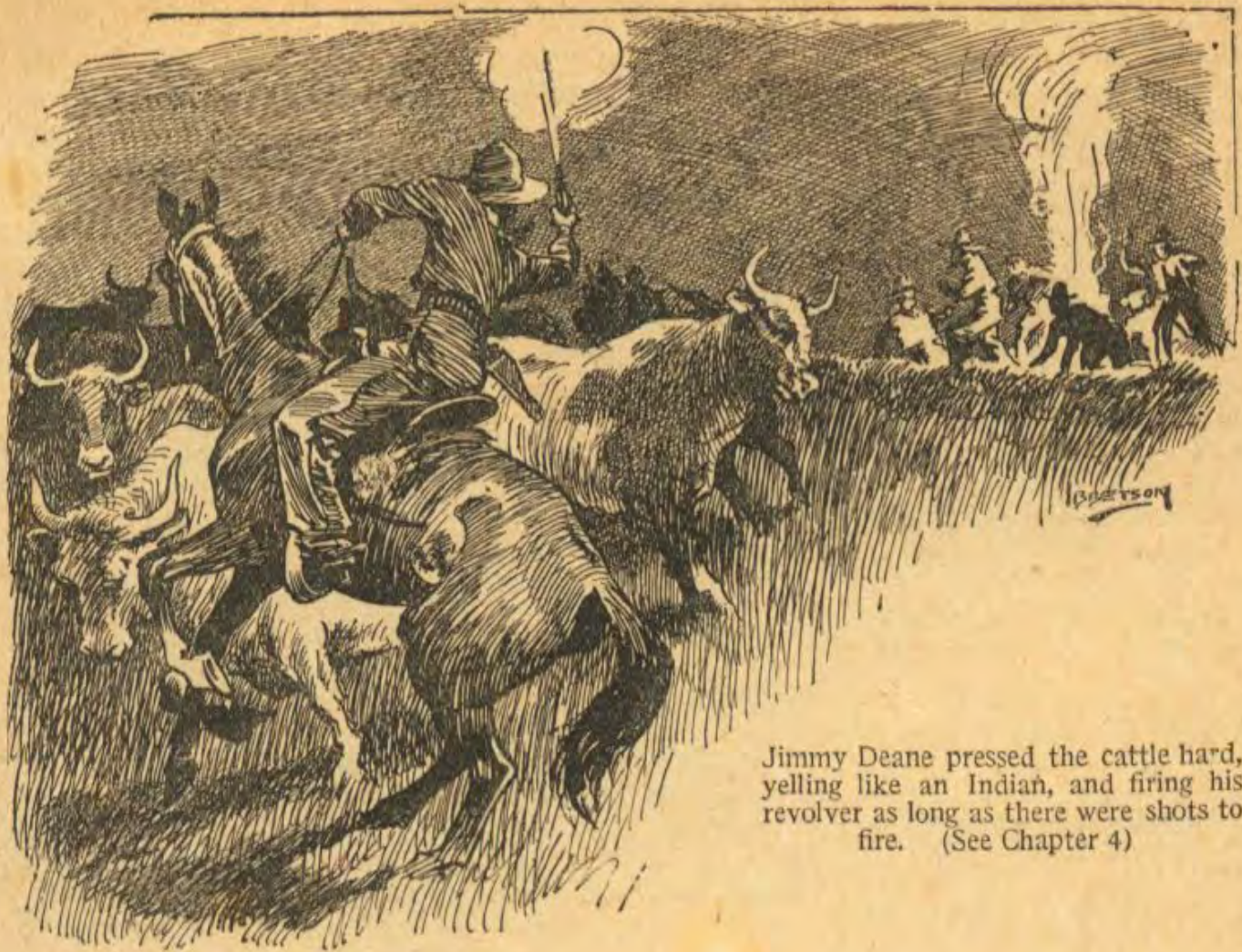
Underhand Work!

"STILL sick of this country?" asked Arizona Jim, rubbing his monocle against his flowing necktie.

"Yes," grinned Jimmy Deane. "Sick to death of it."

But he did not mean it. This was a different Jimmy Deane from the drudge that the boys of the Lazy B Ranch had loved so much to haze and bulldoze. Even though less than a fortnight had elapsed since Arizona Jim had taken the sullen tenderfoot in hand, there had come about a great change in the lad who had been sent out here to be chastened by an uncle with wrong ideas.

For the slouch had gone out of Jimmy's shoulders; the scowl had left his brow. There was a clear, far-seeing look in his eyes now, a tan on his cheeks that he had not been able to collect whilst working in the ranch compound or the cookhouse. And there was an air of confidence about the way in which he handled the mettlesome horse that he bestrode—one of Cooper's best saddlers. For certainly Arizona Jim's words had served to make Frank Cooper feel more than a little ashamed of himself, with the result that Frank now was a well-mounted fellow, and had proved he could be trusted with a good horse, even though he was no good at "forking" outlaws that nobody would ever want to ride as a regular thing. On these Western ranches



Jimmy Deane pressed the cattle hard, yelling like an Indian, and firing his revolver as long as there were shots to fire. (See Chapter 4)

they often keep an intractable horse for the purpose of mounting tenderfeet upon them and getting a little amusement. But a man who can break a buckjumper is not always the best man to put astride a well-broken, well-bred animal; and, vice versa, the best rider of a good horse is not always the broncho-buster.

"Fed up to the teeth with it," grinned Jimmy Deane. "My hat, if the other Britishers you speak about went about with you for a bit, I'm not surprised that they got to like this country. I've never had such a time in my life as I've had these last ten days."

He was right there. Adventure had been his every day during the time he had roamed the hills and plains in company with this lion-hearted Indian agent. Each day had seen some event that, to Jimmy Deane, spelt pure adventure, though to the ordinary fellow living the life there it might have been but

everyday happening. For life in the Wild West is not tame at any time.

Affairs with sulky Indians in their reservations; clashes with bumptious and unscrupulous sheriffs; meetings with shady characters whom it was not Arizona's job to arrest—they had all come Jimmy Deane's way. And his appetite for incident was now thoroughly whetted. In these days Jimmy had learned more about the real West than he had imagined he could learn in the previous five months.

Arizona Jim was a scout such as, perhaps, even Buffalo Bill could not have beaten. His eyes were the eyes of a hawk. Once or twice he had shown how quick he could be on the draw—though he was no gun-man. And, further, he had taught Jimmy something about gunmanship; and now Jimmy and a six-chambered Colt were never separated from each other.



Jimmy hurled his empty gun full at the rustler's head, sending him headlong from the saddle. (See Chapter 4)

"I'm not going to lose the old girl," said Arizona Jim, stroking the glossy neck of the beautiful bay mare he was riding. "That's why I bet her, because I know you'd soon get the love of Western life in your blood. Now, lad, do you want a job?"

He halted his horse at the beginning of a sharp declivity in the ground and pointed downwards. Below them was a ravine with steeply sloping sides. Down the slopes small fir-trees grew. But in amongst the trees, near the bottom, they could see several men and horses.

"Anything to do?" asked Jimmy, using his eyes.

"May be something," said Arizona. "Smell anything?"

"Smells like something burning," said Jimmy.

"Something is burning," said Arizona Jim. "None of my business, I know—but what are men branding cattle for this time of the year? There's no round-up on."

"That's so," said Jimmy; and he peered harder, until he was able to recognise one of the men working down below. "That's Pieface Walters of the Lazy B working down there," he said.

"Go down and see what they're doing," said Arizona Jim, chuckling, "but don't

get Pieface Walters annoyed. He's a hot-tempered man, isn't he?"

"He would have been the second man I'd have licked if you hadn't come along in time to save him," smiled Jimmy. "One of the cleverest of the Lazy B bunch. Want me to go down alone?"

"Yes, why not?" asked Arizona Jim. "You've got to learn to use your wits a bit, if you're going to stay out here."

Jimmy grinned. He hadn't yet decided that he was going to stick it out in Wyoming, though certainly he was looking at the life from another angle now, as Arizona Jim had prophesied. But the truth was he enjoyed doing things for the Indian agent.

He drove his horse down the steep slope, picking his way carefully amongst the trees. His animal made some slight noise in going through the underbush; but he was not seen by the five men who were working about a little wood fire. As he got nearer the stench of singed hair and flesh grew very pungent.

He halted his horse for a moment and watched these men as one of them went around a corner made by a hillock of land, and returned a few moments later with a rope in his hands, the other end of the rope being attached to an unwilling yearling steer.

As he watched, the five other men seized this steer and, despite its bawlings, threw it to the ground. Then Pieface Walters, who had been working with sundry irons in the little fire, took from the embers a white-hot branding iron and dabbed it on the flank of the struggling steer. There was a heart-rending roar from the animal. The stench was increased, but the steer was allowed to get to its feet and was led off again by the man who had fetched it to the fire.

Another steer was treated the same way as Jimmy, unobserved, looked on. He could not understand it. He wrinkled his brow, trying to think it out, for he knew this was not the branding season. When the third stocker was brought, protesting, up to the branding fire, he disclosed himself.

They all looked up with a start when he rode on the scene, and one or two put hands to guns. Probably they would have drawn their weapons, only Pieface Walters gave a laugh.

"Sall right, boys, it's only our pet tender-foot," he said. "I guess he's gettin' used to the saddle, and has stumbled on to us by accident."

"But we're brandin'," said one of Pieface's companions, and he scowled at the tender-foot, who was still trying to make out what the game of these men was. That it was a dishonest one he was more than convinced now.

"You see," drawled the lad at length, "I'm learning how to be a cowboy. Why, that's a Lazy B steer, isn't it?"

He pointed to a very clear brand burnt on the haunch of the animal. "Surely it's clear enough, isn't it, without renewing it?"

The five looked at each other quickly. Then Pieface Walters spoke. He looked angry. And he thought he was still addressing the drudge of Lazy B Ranch.

"Beat it!" he said roughly. "When you know more about a cowpuncher's job ye'll understand more. Git!"

He waved a red-hot branding-iron threateningly into Jimmy's face. Jimmy drew his horse back a foot or two, to avoid getting his hair and eyebrows singed.

The end of the iron came very close—so close that he saw one thing distinctly. This branding iron, when it was stamped upon the hide of an animal, would certainly not make a "B" lying on its side—the Lazy B. It would, instead, make a circle of almost four inches in diameter. And Jimmy was not such a fool as many thought him. He knew that the "B" they stamped on Cooper's cattle was just about three inches long.

"Brand-blotting, are they?" he thought.

But he did not shout out to the others all he knew.

"Beat it!" said Pieface, and whipped his gun out.

Jimmy turned his horse obediently, and set it up the slope again. At the top he met Arizona Jim again.

"Did you know what they were doing down there, Arizona?" he asked, eyeing his Indian agent friend curiously.

"It's my job to know a lot of things," said Arizona Jim, with a little laugh. "Some sheriffs would give their ears to know what I find out. And what crooked work are they up to down there?"

Jimmy told the Indian agent what he had seen and what he had concluded. And Arizona Jim nodded his head.

"Easy enough to change the Lazy B into a Circle B," he said. "It's an old stunt. But I didn't know the Circle B people were on the crooked game. Well, don't that give you an idea?"

"Several," Jimmy said. "I suppose I ought to tell Cooper——"

"Cowpunchers in this country," said Arizona Jim, "don't go telling their boss things till they can prove what they say. Any fool can go blabbing to his boss. But the real Westerner gets evidence. Now, have you got any ideas?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. "A good one. There's a lot of Lazy B steers down there."



"I want a lift!" said Jimmy. "I'm riding to the place where you dump the mail bags. Arizona Jim's orders!" "Hop up!" said Hank. "At once!" (See Chapter 5)

getting their brands altered. Looks to me as though the clever people at Cooper's ranch aren't quite so clever as they seem to think they are—and they're letting rustlers rob their boss."

"Not forgetting that they are harbouring in their midst as a cowpuncher one Pieface Walters, who is one of the rustlers," grinned Arizona Jim.

"Pieface Walters used to say nasty things to me," said Jimmy. "I guess I'll have to think out what to do."

"Then you're interested enough in the ranch to want to save Cooper's cattle?" asked Arizona Jim.

"Of course!" said Jimmy.

"Then you're getting to like the life," said Arizona Jim, with a merry laugh.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

One to the Tenderfoot

ARIZONA JIM had grown very quiet, very much lacking in ideas, it seemed. When Jimmy asked him for his advice, he gave it sparingly.

"As a matter of fact," said Arizona, "this is your stunt, and I want you to work it out yourself. Call me second-fiddle here."

"Dashed funny thing, if you knew that all this brand-blotting was going on, you didn't stop it by telling somebody!" said Jimmy.

"I did tell somebody," smiled the Indian agent. "I told you."

"And you expect me to stop it?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure, why not?" smiled Arizona Jim. "If you work this case out to a satisfactory conclusion, you'll feel so good that you'll begin to think you've got a place in the West, after all. So get your headpiece to work, lad."

"I'm going, first of all," said Jimmy, half-hesitantly, "to find out where they're collecting all the cattle whose brands they're blotting. Then I'm going to drive 'em off and back to the Lazy B Ranch. The newly burned circle around the old 'B' will prove that they've been tampered with."

"And Cooper 'll begin to realise that he wasted you when he kept you grubbing around Chop Suey's cookhouse," said Arizona.

"Point is, where to look for the place where

they're rounding up," said Jimmy. "By Jove, I've got it!"

And he turned his horse and led the way. Arizona Jim, chuckling to himself, followed him.

It was early evening now, two or three hours after Jimmy had caught Pieface Walters in the act of blotting his employer's brands. In those two hours Jimmy had talked about the brand-blotting business, and had found Arizona Jim sparse with ideas on the matter. Plainly the Indian agent was leaving everything to Jimmy, and thus was expanding the lad.

Straight back to the ravine where they had seen the blotting going on Jimmy led his Indian agent friend. Down into the ravine he rode. Now there was no sign of the gang of rustlers. There were only the dead ashes of the branding fire to be seen—and tracks. It was the tracks Jimmy looked for, and, once he had found them, discovered that they would be quite easy to follow, for they were the hoofprints in the grass and sand of over twenty head of cattle. He called up to Arizona Jim, who rode down to him.

"These tracks 'll lead us to where we want to go," he said with conviction; and closely followed the trail which led him for some distance down the ravine, then up on to the higher level of the plain.

And for several miles they rode, until all grew dark, and the tracks became hard to follow. But Jimmy's eyes had grown wonderfully quick and keen under the tuition of this extraordinary Indian agent. He found he could follow them without overmuch difficulty.

And presently they came to another deep ravine, and at the bottom of this they saw the gleam of another fire, about which men were lolling, while to their ears came the lowing of many cattle.

Now, undoubtedly, Jimmy Deane was all a-thrill with excitement and the lust for adventure.

"What's the plan?" asked Arizona Jim coolly.

"Rush 'em!" said Jimmy. "I'll stampede the cattle off. If those brutes follow us, we'll fight. They're only five to two!"



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THE ATTACK ON THE BITTER CREEK STAGE I
A Thrilling Episode of the Adventurous West

"Fire-eater!" chuckled Arizona Jim. "What about getting out a sheriff's posse?"

"Come on!" muttered Jimmy, and, dismounting, carefully led his horse down the slope. Arizona Jim, chuckling, but taking care that his revolver was handy and loose in its holster, imitated him.

The lowing of the cattle and the talk of the men about the camp-fire made it so that these two adventurers were not heard before they got down to the lower level of the ravine. And it was so dark now that men within the circle

"Might as well do something startling," he said at length, and pulled out his revolver. He mounted again.

Three shots he blazed into the air, and, at the same time, yelled like a blood-mad Indian. He edged his horse up against the restless and lowing cattle.

"Gosh—what's——" came from the fire.

"Just you stay right there! I've got the drop on you!" came in the clear accents of Arizona Jim. Followed a shot, a shout of bitter pain. And then the cattle began to move off



The lad stood and lashed up the six stage horses furiously. The coach rocked and swayed and creaked, and all the time the passenger kept up a hot fire on the rustlers. (See Chapter 5)

of the firelight could see nothing much outside it. Jimmy purposely gave the fire a fairly wide berth, and edged around until he came close to the outer edge of a fair-sized herd of young steers. It was too dark to see how many were there, but he guessed they were a large number.

Arizona Jim stopped when within a few feet of the fire, and mounted his well-trained mare. But he made no move. He was leaving this job entirely to the lad he was set on making a Westerner of.

Jimmy dismounted, and scratched his chin, while Pieface Walters and his associates talked loudly about the camp-fire.

in a close-herded mass, with the excited Jimmy Deane pressing them hard, yelling horribly, firing his revolver as long as there were shots to fire, and conscious that there was a bit of a gun-fight going on behind him between Arizona Jim and the five rustlers.

He could not get the herd moving very quickly at first, though he used his quirt lustily, making the thong hiss on the broad backs of the young stock. But gradually they broke into a gallop. Straight down the ravine they went, Jimmy knowing that they were heading towards the Lazy B Ranch.

But he was not to get the cattle away unmolested, though Arizona Jim was doing nobly

on his behalf to keep the rustlers' attention engaged. One man broke away from the camp fire, found a horse, mounted it, and galloped hotly after Jimmy and the stampede he was striving so hard to set up. The man was Pieface Walters.

The first thing the excited Jimmy knew was that Walters, a gun in his hand, was firing at him from close quarters. Jimmy's hat went into the air after one shot. But the cattle were running well, and the lad, heedless of anything now, drew rein on his horse, and awaited the coming of the ugly-faced cowpuncher-rustler who had been trying to rob the boss of the Lazy B.

Pieface Walters, shouting lurid threats, dashed up to the lad, took aim deliberately at Jimmy, and fired. Like a flash the boy hurled himself out of the saddle; and thus, perhaps, saved his life by a hair's breadth. Pieface Walters, thinking no doubt that his shot had brought the boy to the ground, jerked his horse to a standstill. A moment later he dropped out of the saddle. For, almost without his thinking, Jimmy's empty gun was hurled straight at the rustler's head. It caught Pie-face Walters squarely in the forehead. His horse galloped on without him.

Now the cattle were well ahead. Jimmy caught his well-trained horse, mounted again, and dashed after them.

At the end of a mile or so, the ravine ended naturally, and the little stampede carried on on level ground. And then Jimmy showed that he was something of a natural cowpuncher, for the way he kept those seventy-odd beasts together and moving ought to have fetched words of praise from anybody, had he been seen. But there was nobody near to see him. Where Arizona Jim was, he did not know. Nor did he stop to find out. His job was to get these stolen cattle out of the hands of the men who had stolen them and blotted their brands.

The Lazy B Ranch was seven miles from the spot where they had been herded. And Jimmy knew instinctively the direction in which to go. Nor, at the pace the stampede was travelling, did he take long about getting to his destination. Less than an hour after he had made his bold attempt he came within sight of the ranch buildings.

Straight into the compound he drove the cattle, yelling wildly. He milled them around the somewhat narrow limits of the compound, while several men emerged from the boys' bunkhouse. And Cooper himself came out of the house.

"What have ye got hyar?" asked Dan Flitch, the foreman.

"A bunch of cattle that were pinched," shouted Jimmy. "Clever guys you are, aren't you? While you're loafing about and sleeping here, you let your cattle get lifted, and their brands blotted. You need a tenderfoot, after all, to look after your job!"

A little vainglorious, perhaps, that remark. But then, Jimmy Deane was excited.

While the punchers and their boss examined the altered brands on these cattle, Arizona Jim, safe and sound, as cool and debonair as ever, rode into the compound. But he was alone.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Cooper, when he understood everything. "And I was for keeping the lad penned up in the cookhouse! Who're the rustlers?"

"Red Figgins' gang," said Arizona Jim. "They made a fight for it—but we managed to get away from 'em. We didn't arrest any, though."

"Well, I've got to say," said Cooper, "that this tenderfoot certainly is wakening up some. Do you mean to say he did it all himself?"

"All that mattered," said Arizona Jim, rubbing his monocle. "You have a smarter fellow here than any of you think—and you're going to lose him, if he don't decide to stay out West here after his six months are up."

Dan Flitch and his underlings eyed the tenderfoot in some chagrin. For Jimmy's scornful words had had a sting in them. He had made them feel very cheap and foolish. And if Jimmy did gloat about it, perhaps, as he was only a tenderfoot, he was not to be blamed overmuch.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

Jimmy's Triumph!

"YOU'RE due back home very soon now, aren't you?" quizzed Arizona Jim, eyeing the lad who rode by his side, about a week after the



Yelling like an excited Indian, Jimmy drove the stage straight into the compound at the Lazy B Ranch. (See Chapter 5)

stolen cattle episode. " 'Smatter of fact, I wouldn't wonder that this mail coach that's coming along had a letter from your uncle aboard, containing a draft to pay your passage home."

It was true that Jimmy's six months' penance were served, that he was due to go back home again. It was also true that he was almost daily expecting a preaching letter from Uncle Ben, with, however, a draft in it that he would be able to use as he wished—enough to take him back to England by first-class and saloon.

And it was also true that Jimmy of late had felt strange tuggings at his heart. For he now did not know what he would do when he got that draft. Of course, he was still sick of Wyoming and the rough life of a cowboy. And the prospect of going home again—even though he had nothing to do when he got there—had its attractions.

To be sure, there was fun to be had, after all, out here. And it certainly did him good

to see the change of mind his fellow-punchers at the Lazy B seemed to have had about him since he had been the cause of returning a large number of Cooper's steers to their owner. But—— He looked at Arizona Jim, and decided that one of the finest experiences he had had out West had been getting to know this splendid chap.

"I'll tell you when I see the colour of my uncle's money whether I'm going to win your horse or work for Cooper for six months for nothing," he grinned. "But I can't understand why you want me to stop this coach and board it. Let me see, isn't Cooper expecting his kiddie to come up on it?"

"In charge of a half-breed nurse, yes," said Arizona Jim; and eyed his young companion covertly. "Do you know, that's why I want you to be a passenger on that coach for a stage."

"You're a mysterious chap," said Jimmy. "Never can quite make you out, you know. Never understood why you never tried to get



Arizona Jim rode up to the Lazy B Ranch covering two men, with handkerchiefs still tied over the lower halves of their faces. (See Chapter 5)

those rustlers, Figgins' gang, rounded up after the cattle-rustling affair. And Pieface Walters—it shouldn't have been hard to trace him—although he never did come back to the ranch."

"I work on my own lines," said Arizona Jim. "I'm not a sheriff. Besides, I didn't want those fellows to get rounded up—yet. Well, there's the road the coach is coming along, Jimmy. I'll take your horse, and you stop the coach. And remember—whatever you do, keep your eyes skinned when you come to the pine bluff at Three Forks."

"Why?" asked Jimmy.

"And have your gun loaded and loose in the holster," said Arizona Jim. "I'm giving you credit for having a great deal of common-sense. Well, you'll need it. Ah, there's the coach."

Over to the north they could see a cloud of dust rising in the sun-soaked air, and they knew it for the weekly stage-coach that, driven by Hank Dawson, travelled from Bitter Creek northwards to Wind River township. This route for the coach passed within two miles of the Lazy B Ranch, and it was arranged as a rule for mail-bags and what not to be

dumped at the nearest point to that place, which was the top of a steep hill.

But why Arizona Jim should have warned Jimmy Deane to keep his eyes skinned at Three Forks the boy could not understand. And he knew his Indian agent friend well enough to know that it would be useless to ask further questions. When Arizona Jim wanted to be mysterious, he could be very much so.

Arizona, leading Jimmy's horse, rode away from the coach road, leaving Jimmy standing beside the trail. When the coach with its six actionful horses came abreast, Jimmy stepped out into the trail and hailed the driver.

Hank Dawson hauled back on the reins, then grinned when he recognised the tenderfoot. For Hank was a friend of the boys of the Lazy B Ranch, and he had learned a great deal about Jimmy's manner and dislike for this wild Western country.

"Wal, son," said Hank. "Still sick o' this——"

"What's wrong here?" A passenger thrust his head out from inside the coach. He looked like some prosperous miner or something like that. "Held up!"

"Guess nix," laughed Hank Dawson. "Just a tenderfoot wants to pass the time o' day. Some tenderfoot this is, too. Right sick o' the country he is, and——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Jimmy. "I want a lift. I'm riding to the place where you dump the Lazy B mailbags. Arizona Jim's orders," he added; and if Hank had wanted to demur at first, mention of that famous man's name caused him not to do so.

"Hop up, then," he said.

Jimmy climbed up and took a seat alongside Hank.

"We got Frank Cooper's kid and her nurse aboard, inside," said Hank conversationally as he gathered up his reins skilfully and flourished his long whip. "Guess ye been sent to meet the stage an' escort them to the ranch—nix?"

"Maybe," said Jimmy; and wondered just why Arizona Jim had ordered him to do this thing.

"Kid's a bit frettish, kind of," said Hank, and flicked the off-side leader on the ear. "She's had a rough journey, from Cheyenne, and the nurse says she ain't too strong. Been pinin' for her ma an' pa. Giddap, thar!"

For several miles the spanking team of stage-coach horses drew the jolting and creaking coach along that unsurfaced trail. Hank was a skilled driver, and the way he handled those animals compelled Jimmy to feel great admiration for him. For it did not seem to matter whether Hank were driving on the level, down the slope of a deep ravine, or up it on the other side, he kept these six nags well up to their bits constantly; well into their collars. Such driving takes years of training. Yet Jimmy once found himself wondering whether he would ever be so neat with the "ribbons," until, with a laugh, he realised that it was just a toss-up whether he stayed on here a bit longer or went back to England and the uncle who had sent him out here to be disciplined.

"Got the mail aboard, I suppose?" he asked Hank.

"Sure; and the postmaster at Bitter Creek said as how there was a letter with an English stamp for you," said Hank, who was an incurable gossip. "Nothin' valuable aboard, for which I'm right glad, as I've heard Figgins' gang's knocking about this county now."

A hundred yards ahead of them now was the place where Arizona Jim had told him to keep his eyes skinned, his gun ready. He felt to assure himself that the gun was ready.

Looking ahead, he saw a horseman suddenly ride out on to the trail. This man stood his nag right in the coach's track.

"Somebody else stoppin' us—for a lift, maybe," said Hank, and drew rein as soon as he came level with this horseman. Then he growled something bitter to himself, for he, as well as Jimmy Deane, saw the man had a light-coloured handkerchief so tied that it covered the lower part of his face, showing just his eyes. And the man had a gun in his hand.

"Here—giddap!" shouted Hank, to the horses.

But just then five more men, all disguised in the same manner, came out from the trees of the bluff, and each of these five men was armed. Every gun they had was presented at Hank and Jimmy, on the box of the coach.

"Hands right up" came the shout; and at once Hank crammed the reins of the six horses between his knees and held up his hands.

"What's the idea, boys?" asked Hank. "I ain't got nothin' worth takin' aboard to-day."

"Guess ye got Cooper's kid—and she's goin' to be worth somethin' to us," said a man, who appeared to be the leader of this hold-up party. "So you just don't move—and you, too, younster!"

Two guns now were levelled steadily at Hank and at Jimmy, who both held their hands well up. The male passenger inside the stage coach thrust his head out of the window, and also held up his hands.



"Let us forget the unpleasant things, Jimmy," said the rancher simply. "We've treated you rotten, but—" Jimmy shook hands solemnly all round. (See Chapter 5)

Four men rode to the side of the stage. One of them dismounted, and reached out a hand to open the door.

There was a scream inside; the half-breed nurse uttered it. It was followed by a whimper of fright from the child.

"This won't do!" muttered Jimmy; and thought he knew why Arizona Jim had made him take this ride. Arizona Jim had known that this hold-up was going to take place; he had the ability to find out many things that sheriffs and others would have loved to know. And Arizona Jim had put him aboard the coach as a sort of escort to the child of his boss! Or, so it struck Jimmy, who had an imagination that had been greatly developed during the few weeks he had been so close a companion of the Indian agent.

And that thought made him at once determined to justify the confidence his hero had in him. This hold-up gang should not succeed in their attempt.

He asked for death, perhaps, but he gave no thought to the possibility of it when, suddenly, he dropped one hand with the speed of light, and made his revolver leap into his hand. And he fired a shot almost before the gun had left the holster. Arizona Jim had trained him well at drawing quickly. And a man who was covering him and Hank Dawson dropped limply from the saddle. The other man took rapid aim and fired; but Jimmy took no notice of the stab of pain that caught him in the right ear. He fired again. The hold-up man's horse reared, plunged, and came to earth.

The screaming inside the coach increased. The other rustlers began to shout. But Jimmy took no notice of them. He deliberately thrust the muzzle of his revolver against the ear of Hank Dawson.

"Drive—like fury!" he yelled. "Hurry, now!"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Hank.

But he obeyed, picked up the reins, lashed the horses into a gallop, and the coach, with a jerk, started into motion. And it began to roll down a hill almost at once, though the horses went with taut traces.

For a moment the hold-up men were bewildered with the speed of it. They let the coach get some yards ahead of them before

they began to pursue it. By then the stage was rocking and swaying sickeningly, and Hank was standing up and lashing away at the horses in a manner that—for Jimmy's revolver stayed pressed against his ear—told that the youngster was quite serious in his demands for speed, also that Hank was respecting those demands.

"But they'll ketch us up, and——" Hank yelled.

"No, they won't," roared Jimmy; and turned backwards suddenly.

He fired two shots at the rustlers who were galloping in the rear of the stage. A horse went down. Then the male passenger inside, leaning out through the window, also lent his gun to the bombardment. Another man and horse went down. The remainder of the hold-up men fell back a little.

Jimmy heard a groan come from Hank. He saw the man slip down in his seat; Hank almost let go the reins. But, dropping his gun to the dashboard at his feet, Jimmy snatched them up. He was lucky enough to grab them all. He took the whip as well from the fiercely clenched hand of Hank. Then he put a foot on Hank's body to keep the driver from slipping off to the ground.

Furiously, the lad stood up and lashed those six stage horses. What he lacked in skill at driving he made up in the luck that was his that day. For the horses kept their feet. The coach swayed and rocked and creaked; and the man inside it kept up a smart fire on those men who followed—but now at some sort of a respectful distance. The mad excitement of it all got into Jimmy's blood so that he whooped and yelled like a madman as he drove that fear-inspired team forwards along the trail.

They came to the spot which was the nearest bit of this road to the Lazy B. Jimmy recognised it. And, in his triumph, he decided once again to cause a sensation at the place where they had tried to make a drudge of him.

He swung the team off to the left. He left the main trail and began to use a thinner, narrower buggy track that he knew would take him to the Lazy B.

And, seeing what the stage coach was doing, the hold-up men, properly foiled, abandoned the attempt. For they knew there were

several stern men at the end of that buggy trail.

"I've done it!" Jimmy yelled, still whipping away as he saw the roofs of the Lazy B buildings. "Giddap, there!"

"Gosh, yer some driver, boy!" shrieked Hank Dawson, who lay huddled up there on the footboard, with Jimmy's foot holding him firmly into place. "Who said ye was a soft-handed gink?"

"Let 'em say it again—any of 'em!" shouted Jimmy.

A few minutes later, at the same old gallop, yelling like an excited Indian, Jimmy drove the stage-coach straight into the compound at the Lazy B. He had some difficulty in hauling the lathering team down to a standstill before they got mixed up with the mesh wire that bounded the enclosure. He had to mill the team round and round the yard before he could stop them, and by that time most of the punchers there and the boss himself was staring open-mouthed at the sight. But at length three cowpunchers ran to the heads of the gasping animals and held them quiet. Then it was that Jimmy threw his reins away and hopped to the ground. He assisted the wounded Hank down also. Then he opened the door, and took from the arms of a half-breed woman a little girl who was sobbing convulsively, who clung to the tenderfoot closely. Jimmy handed the child over to her father.

"What's it all mean?" asked Frank Cooper blankly.

Jimmy pointed to several bullet-marks on the coach. Then he indicated the male passenger inside and Hank Dawson.

"Ask them," he said shortly. "They'll be more believed that I would. I'm only a blessed tenderfoot, you see."

Half an hour later Arizona Jim rode on to the ranch premises. He was not alone. He had three men with him—all of whom rode with their hands well up—all with handkerchiefs still over the lower halves of their faces.

"The others weren't quite fit to come," explained the Indian agent. "You fellows on the coach did a bit of good shooting. But they're all that's left of Figgins' gang—and your Pieface Walters is amongst them. Pieface, if pressed, will talk considerably."

And Pieface, being pressed, did talk—explaining a great deal. At the end of the explanation, Frank Cooper understood just how much he owed to his young tenderfoot. Nor would Arizona Jim admit that anything was owing to him, though he certainly had done the "staff-work," as he did it on the brand-blotting episode.

Later, Jimmy Deane was reading a letter, the while he clutched in his hand a banker's draft for a hundred pounds, when there was a little deputation waited on him in the bunk-house. The deputation was headed by Frank Cooper himself.

"Tell us you're staying on in this country, old chap," said Cooper. "We've discovered we need men like you—fellows who can act quickly."

Jimmy clutched his draft. With that hundred pounds he knew he could get home in comfort, and then have something left over. Then he looked at his comrades of the ranch. Finally, he looked at Arizona Jim, who was at the back of the deputation.

"Huh!" he growled. But he winked at the Indian agent. "I'm sick of your country—but I've discovered that this ranch needs me here! I've been wakened up, and now I've discovered that a few of the Lazy B fellows are half asleep." He looked at the draft again, and sighed. "I'll need this, I suppose, to keep myself with, seeing I've lost my bet, and will have to work for Cooper for six months for nothing."

"You'll work for double pay, you mean," said Frank Cooper hastily. Then he held out his hand. "Let's forget the unpleasant things Jimmy," the rancher said simply. "We all make mistakes sometimes. We treated you rotten, but——"

"But he isn't going to be sick of the West any more," put in Arizona Jim quietly. "He's wakened up—and he's made a place for himself out here. He's going to be a good enough Westerner from now on—aren't you, Jimmy?"

"Do you know," grinned Jimmy Deane. "I believe I am."

He held out his hand to his comrades. They all solemnly shook it for him.

THE END.