

WILD HORSES

BY WILL C. BARNES

I

ON the top of a small prairie mountain dotted with half a dozen wide-spreading cedar trees, a man armed with a pair of field glasses eagerly scanned the country below him. A short distance away his horse stood close to a tree as if to screen him from sight. For all the interest the animal took in his surroundings he might have been a graven image. His closed eyes, the pendulous lower lip lying loosely back from his teeth, the flopping ears, indicated very clearly that he was sound asleep.

Suddenly he raised his head in a startled way, looked off into the hazy distance, cocked first one ear, then the other, in the direction his eyes were taking, as horses always do when they discover some moving object coming suddenly into view. The change from complete indifference to an attitude of keen interest was remarkable. The rattling of the long chains on the heavy Spanish bit in the animal's mouth caught the man's ear. He glanced toward him.

'What you see, old fellow?' he queried. 'I have n't been able to get my eyes on a single movin' thing since we came up here exceptin' that skulkin' coyote down there on the flat watchin' for a dinner of fat prairie-dog. What you wigglin' them ears for?'

Taking a position before the horse, the man trained the field glasses in line with the pointing ears. 'H-m-m, shucks!' he said, beneath his breath.

'There's what ole Blue Jay's lookin' at. Beats all how quick a hoss will catch sight of anything a-movin'. That's either a "dust-devil" or the smoke from a bunch of runnin' hosses.' A minute's close study of the distant bit of yellowish dust; then — 'No, 't ain't a dust-devil, for it strings along the tops of them trees 'stead of risin' straight up. Hosses all right, an' I reckon it's Bill, hazin' old Baldy along after a bunch of broom-tails.'

He turned to the horse. 'Come alive, old skate, for if I'm not mistaken you got a regular job cut out for you. If that there dust comes from a bunch of wild ones headed by that renegade gray hoss what got away from the schoolmarm last fall, it'll take some ridin' to head 'em into a corral.'

Rapidly he loosened the cinches, re-set his saddle, threw the long reins over the horse's neck, and swung on to his back. Still keeping close to the trees as if to hide his presence, he scanned the point in the distance where he expected the bunch of wild horses to emerge from the shelter of the trees into the open prairie. Soon the leaders broke into sight, swinging along on a smooth, sweeping run, dropping at intervals into a fast trot, with necks outstretched, manes and tails flying in the wind. Twenty-seven grown animals he counted, all dark colors except the leader, a gray which he knew to be the notorious escaped saddle-horse 'Steeldust,' the animal every cowboy

on that range would gladly give a month's wages to capture.

The man smiled as he recalled the dramatic incident of Steeldust's escape from civilization. Caught three years before from a band of wild horses, broken, and fairly domesticated, the gray had been a gift from his captor to a young woman who came to the little hamlet in the valley to teach the dozen or more sons and daughters of the local stockmen their three *R's*, plus a little respect for discipline. She was an adventurous girl and one day riding alone, far out on the range, she saw a band of wild horses coming down the trail to water at a little prairie lake, and gave chase for the pure love of a wild, reckless ride.

From that first jump, her horse strained every nerve to overtake his former companions of the open ranges. For a mile or so she tore after them like mad. Steeldust, named after a noted Texas race stallion, needed no touch of spur or quirt. Twice the girl kept the band from reaching the shelter of a deep 'cedar brake' in which they would have buried themselves safe from pursuit. Her mount was too fast for them, and as she swung out to one side and waved her hat, the leader changed his course and raced away in the opposite direction, only to dash again for the cedars when she fell back a little.

Suddenly one of the band stumbled, lost its footing, and went headlong to the ground, rolled clear over, lay still for a moment, then was up on its feet, and with wild neighings raced after the rest. Almost on the instant, the girl realized the cause of its fall, for she found herself in the midst of a prairie-dog village, the open holes dangerous pitfalls for a horse.

Her cowboy friends had always told her never to try to guide her mount through such a place — to 'give him his head and trust to luck.' But instinct

prevailed. A huge hole, where some hungry badger had dug out a good dinner of prairie-dogs, yawned under the horse's feet. She gave a sharp pull on the reins. The next moment she went flying over his head to the bare ground of the dog town. When she recovered consciousness it was past midday, and there was absolutely nothing in sight but a saucy prairie-dog that sat atop of his family mound, scolding angrily at her for daring to intrude on his privacy.

Except for a cut on her forehead from a sharp rock, she was unhurt. Late that evening she was discovered by a cowboy who took her up in front of him on his saddle and carried her back to town, little the worse for her experience.

From that time on, every cow-puncher in the region wasted more than his share of perfectly good horseflesh in efforts to find her lost horse. Fortunately she was able to point out almost the exact spot where she had fallen. She recalled that as she went over the horse's head she had felt her saddle turn on his side and swing underneath his round belly. Not being used to carrying a saddle on that part of his anatomy, the horse had probably stampeded, incidentally kicking the saddle to bits. Half a mile from where she fell they began to pick up pieces of the wreck: here a broken stirrup-leather; there a pair of saddle pockets; her saddle rope; the quirt Sandy Bowers plaited for her that was hanging on the horn; her slicker that was tied on the cantle; and finally the saddletree itself, a mere wreck of its former beauty, the broken *latigo* showing how the horse had finally rid himself of it. Minus this embarrassment, Steeldust, to quote one of the boys, 'surely quit the flats and went yonderly, headed for his old wild bunch.'

One of the girl's last gifts from an

admiring puncher had been a handsome plaited bridle, made of the finest of leather strings, decorated with fancy horsehair knots and tassels, with long, slender, plaited-horsehair reins, far better suited for use on some Wild West day in town than for common range-riding. Not far from the saddle they found the reins, broken at the bit-chains when the horse had stepped upon them as they dragged under his forefeet. To rid himself of the fancy bridle, which had no throat-latch, would be comparatively easy.

'Once a wild one, always a wild one' is a well-known saying on the Western ranges, and a horse captured from a band of wild horses can never be trusted to stay on a strange range. Foot-loose, no matter how weary, he at once orients himself and with almost unerring directness makes his way straight back to the range where he knows he will find his former companions. Once with them, he seems inspired with a far keener sense of danger, and with far greater ability to escape from those hated riders who would again enslave him, than he had before he knew the feeling of a hackamore about his nose or the pressure of cinches on his ribs.

II

There were at that time on the range probably ten thousand practically worthless range-horses — 'broom-tails' they were called. Many were branded, many not, mavericks for anyone who could capture and brand them.

The range was a 'cedar-brake' country with numerous large areas of close-growing cedars, interspersed with open grassy spots. Whenever a band of wild horses grazed on these openings one of them kept watch and ward for mounted men. At the first glimpse of a man on horseback the alarm was

given in some mysterious way, and at once the whole band was on the keen run, headed for the shelter of the cedars. Into these they dived deep, breaking up into single units like hunted deer, but with far more skill and cunning than any other wild animal known to man. The only possible way to find them was by trailing — a slow and generally unsuccessful process; for long before their pursuers came in sight the keen ears of the horses heard them and the band was off, slipping silently through the thickets, dodging like coyotes chased by hounds. When water was to be found in the cedars their capture was almost out of the question, for then they never left the sheltering trees. When watering places became scarce and the horses were obliged to go to the tanks, reservoirs, springs, and streams where the range cattle drank, their capture became more possible. Here again the wild horses showed their almost uncanny ability to remain free, for when forced to come out into the open to drink they for the most part watered at night.

It was not unusual for the cowboys to watch such watering-places on bright moonlight nights. And when the horses had drunk their fill it was great sport to follow up the band and try to rope one or two selected animals as they made their way up the trail, fairly water-logged. With this handicap a good lively horse had rather the best of the chase and occasionally the pursuer was able to lie alongside of a horse after a five- or six-mile chase and rope him.

Then the rider's troubles began, for handling a wild horse at night is no easy matter. The saddle horse is nearly always tired and winded from the long chase, and with the rope tied to the saddle horn he is quite as likely to be thrown, if caught with his feet

off the ground, as the wild horse is; for of all lively things at the end of a forty-foot rope an unbroken range-horse is about the liveliest. If the rider is in luck, he finally wears the captive out and chokes him down. But the instant the wild horse hits the ground the rider, trusting his mount to hold the advantage by a rope tied hard and fast to the horn, must leap like a flash from the saddle. The hogging-string in his mouth, he pulls the long tail of the horse through between the animal's hind legs, and digs his knees deep in the backbone just in front of the hips, the long tail clenched taut in his hands. Man and horse fight it out in the moonlight. If the man's strength holds out, and the tail-hold does n't break, the horse cannot get on his feet, but he can do some very scientific struggling and fighting in his endeavors to get up. His forefeet fan the air like flails, and if the saddle horse lets up in the least on the rope, the captive's head swings back and forth, at times striking the man on the legs, hard enough, in one recorded instance, to break a bone. If the saddle horse does his bit and holds the rope taut as an iron rod, the matter is settled much sooner, for that choking slip-noose, biting deep into the captive's neck just behind the jawbones, cuts off his wind and he gives up and stretches out as if dead.

Then some lightning work must be done in 'hog-tying' the prostrate horse. On one end of the six-foot hogging-rope is a running noose. This is slipped over the two forefeet, the bight of the rope is thrown over the upper hind foot above the hoof, and the three feet are thus pulled together in a close bunch and fastened securely with the rest of the hogging-rope. Thus tied the animal is helpless. Some equally quick movements must follow to get slack from the saddle rope and

keep the animal from choking to death. Not infrequently, when the rope is loosened he *is* dead, and the cowboy rides back to camp disgusted at his luck and at the 'waste of good horse-flesh' — meaning his own saddle horse.

Naturally all that can be done at night is to leave the wild horse where he lies; but the cowboy comes back at the first crack of day driving a burro, or sometimes several of these patient phlegmatic animals. Around the burro's neck there is a strong leather strap four inches wide, and attached to it a chain about two feet long with a swivel in the middle. At the other end is another strap. Leading the burro, trained for such work, alongside the prostrate horse, the cowboy pulls the head of the burro down until the strap can be worked around the neck of the captive and buckled closely behind his head. Then the hogging-rope is loosened and the captive is allowed to get on his feet.

Then follow some very exciting performances by the 'necked-up' couple. Naturally the horse tries his best to break loose and, failing that, to carry off with him his unwelcome friend. Here the stubborn nature of the donkey helps mightily, for he will sit back on that strap and dig his forefeet into the ground, and sooner or later the captive will give it up as a bad job and settle down to a 'watchful-waiting' game. If the burro moves an inch the horse is ready to accompany him, but always toward the open range where his band has long since been swallowed up in the cedars. Sometimes the two start off at a smart run. As long as they go toward the ranch where the burro is kept, and which he recognizes as home, things go nicely; but let the direction change, the burro spreads his forelegs wide, digs those small round feet deep into the soil, and though dragged fifty feet or more, leaving

great scars on the prairie as if from a breaking-plough, he stubbornly persists, and eventually the horse gives up and awaits further developments.

With a well-trained burro necked to his captive the cowboy may ride back to the ranch and leave the two to fight it out, feeling sure that the odd couple will make their way down the range to the watering-place some time or other, generally by sunset that day. By the time the burro has delivered his charge at the home ranch the horse is fairly tamed. His neck has been stretched and rasped and is sore with the pulling and hauling, and he is perfectly willing to follow meekly at the side of his partner, who steers him into the corral, where with a little manoeuvring the boys slip a hackamore over his head and make it fast, unbuckle the strap from his neck, and leave him to think matters over during the long night.

Hungry and sore as he is from nose to tail, handling him the next morning is not a difficult job. An hour's work with a keen whip and some sharp jerks on the hackamore rope, and he is trained to lead like a dog, a trick he never forgets so long as he lives. The rest of his education comes slowly, but eventually he is turned over to the *remuda* sufficiently broken to stand for mounting with reasonable quiet, to be saddled, and bridled, and 'hobbled out' at night. His complete education as a cow pony comes gradually, taking generally two full seasons of hard round-up work.

The worst of this capturing process is that about three out of four horses so tied down and left overnight are dead the next morning, having worn themselves out thrashing the ground with their heads and fighting to get their feet loose. With horses worth only a dollar or two each, this plan is practical only in the case of animals of

unusual size and beauty. The ordinary ones are not worth the horseflesh spent upon them.

III

It took Steeldust a comparatively short time to find his way back to his old band. Shy and untrammelled as they are, wild horses invariably run on some particular part of the range and, knowing this, an animal separated from them soon finds them again.

The first time Steeldust was sighted on the range after his escape, four men, mounted on their best horses, took turns in running the band. Each rider, in turn, endeavored to work the bunch in a great circle, eventually swinging them back close to where another man sitting on a hill followed their progress by the dust arising from their hurrying feet, and fell in after the band, relieving his predecessor's tired horse. In the dusk of the evening, after twelve consecutive hours' hard running, the band, leg-weary and only able to strike a slow trot, were worked by two of the men up to the entrance to a large corral of cedar posts, the men's horses even more tired than the wild ones. Suspicious to the last degree, the leaders would not enter, although they could see that the corral was empty. Realizing that it was their last chance, the men crowded the animals, hoping to force one or two to enter and draw the others after them.

Suddenly a single mare at one side of the band, crowded too closely by one of the riders, broke back and started for the open range. Instantly she was followed by another and still another until inside of two minutes the whole band — about forty grown horses — was streaming past, outward bound. In three minutes the entire band was lost in the gloom and the men, tired, cross, and disgusted, reset their saddles on their worn-out horses and

slowly rode the ten miles to their camp.

For the next two years Steeldust led a lively and probably enjoyable life, for in spite of every trap set for his capture he was still free. Not a saddle horse on the range was able to 'lay alongside of him' in a fair chase.

All summer long the schoolmarm hoped for the return of her horse, and the one great ambition of every puncher on that range was to capture him and deliver him safely to his mistress.

'That there gray hoss has cost the cow men of this range more 'n a thousand dollars in hossflesh and punchers' time,' was the wrathful comment of one owner, whose 'top waddy' left his brag 'circle-horse' out on the range completely exhausted and unable to step one foot after the other. The rider walked ten miles or so into camp in a pair of new cowboy boots with three-inch heels, that skinned his feet so that he could n't walk for a week afterward.

That fall most of the range water dried up and many of the wild horses were watering at a rain-water tank in the midst of a cedar thicket where roping was an impossibility. Around this tank two of the men decided to build a corral and in it to capture the whole band. To carry out this programme it was necessary to build the corral fence in sections so that the horses, always scenting danger, would not stop coming to the water hole. At odd times the men cut posts and planted them stockade fashion in the ground, until the tank was completely enclosed. Whenever they could utilize trees they did so. Then they left the gate open for several days with some large lumps of rock salt inside as a bait. Finally the fateful day arrived when they decided to try to capture the whole bunch.

The heavy pole gate, swung 'up-grade' on rude wooden hinges, was held wide open by a small stick to

which they fastened a long rope. This led to a secure hiding-place formed of cedar boughs, a rustic bower in which one of the men hid and waited patiently for the band to come to water.

Just at dusk the horses came trailing in, but Steeldust was not with them. The rest went into the corral with little hesitation; licked the salt eagerly; drank their fill; then slowly trailed off on the range into the darkness. The man rode back to the camp he had made, a mile or two away, hobbled his pony out to graze, cooked and ate his lone supper, and turned in, hoping for better luck next day. About noon he went back to his post in the cedar bower. Again the horses came to water, this time with the lost horse in the lead. With all the suspicion of the broken horse he scented danger from the first.

Most of the band went into the corral, but he with a few choice spirits remained outside, sniffing at the corral posts and the open gate, advancing, retreating, snorting, touching with that sensitive nose of his everything which to him seemed at all suspicious or which carried with it the scent of man. Head high in air, he noted the cedar bower under which the man lay with beating heart and trembling hands. He walked slowly toward it, smelling the ground at every step, punctuating his progress with snorts of fear. Eventually he reached the bower and stretched his nose cautiously toward it. Horselike, he pawed viciously at the dry ground with one forefoot. A little cloud of dust arose which found its way through the boughs to the man's nose. The man was seized with an awful urge to sneeze. He grabbed his nose to choke it back, but when a sneeze gets ready to operate no power on earth seems able to stop it. The very effort to suppress it simply increased its deadliness. And the result

almost blew the man's hiding-place to pieces. When he had crawled from beneath it, what he said about that gray horse, his ancestry, his breeding, his general characteristics, would fill a book that could not be published and get through the United States mails.

A month later another fellow caught sight of the bunch with Steeldust at its head, drifting slowly through the cedars toward a watering-place. Just at sunset he saw them file slowly down the trail into a deep cañon. At the top of the cañon stood two good-sized pines. The man conceived the idea of hanging his rope across the trail between the two pines in such a way that with a slight jerk it would drop down over the horse's head and make him captive. Half an hour's careful work and he had the loop so hung. He climbed up into the depths of the branches with the loose end in his hand, tied it firmly to a limb, and with the slack in his hands waited patiently for the horses to make their appearance along the trail.

It was almost dark when the lead mare in the bunch walked calmly through beneath him. One after another the horses followed her slowly, for, full of water as they were, the climb up the trail winded them all. Finally Steeldust came demurely along. While he was under the overhanging loop a slight whistle to attract his attention caused the horse to throw up his head in alarm. At this instant the man jerked the rope; the loop dropped fairly over the animal's head, but unfortunately he jumped through it until it ran back against his shoulders.

The man had planned on the spring in the bough to save the rope from breaking, but he had not anticipated a catch so far back on the animal's neck; hence, when the startled horse reached the end of that three-eighths-inch rope and threw his whole weight

against it, something was bound to happen. And it did. The rope broke at the loop, or hondoo, and Steeldust, neighing shrilly for his companions, raced away into the dusk of the evening, victor once more.

As for the man in the tree: in his excitement he entirely overlooked the effect of the jerk on the rope. Leaning eagerly over to watch the horse, he was flung from the springing tree like a stone from a catapult, landing twenty feet away in a pile of rocks, from which he crawled with cuts on his face and arms, and bruises all over his body.

IV

Ten days later a Mormon boy, hunting horses from a freighter's camp and riding a lively young pony bareback with but a rope around his nose to guide him, saw a band of wild horses cross the trail about a mile ahead of him. In the lead was a dappled gray with a short tail. Steeldust's reputation was known to everyone. The boy knew of the offer of fifty dollars to anyone who would bring the horse to the X Camp. The nearest cedars were three or four miles away. His pony had Steeldust blood in his veins and was unhindered by saddle or bridle, with only an eighty-five-pound rider on his back. The boy felt there was a fine chance to 'grab off' that fifty dollars and win everlasting glory. Cleverly he forced the band away from the sheltering cedars toward which they tore from the first jump. A five-mile heat across the sandy prairie and he had ranged fairly close to the tail-enders of the band. Half a mile ahead of him was a long narrow crack in the prairie. In most places its sides were almost perpendicular; it was seldom less than twenty feet wide and in some places it was a hundred deep. The boy knew the country well and forced the

horses toward this crack. The horses, quite as well acquainted with the range and the crack, swerved away from it, while the boy, riding well out at one side, forced them over toward it, for horses will invariably swing in the opposite direction from a rider on their flank; it seems to be an inborn trait.

Eventually the band reached the edge of the crack, hesitated a moment, then swung to the left with the boy on the outside. There was a great curve in the crack at this point and the boy realized that his one chance was to cut across this curve, crowd the horse he wanted as closely as he could, and take a chance of getting within roping distance. As he rode, he had slipped the rope from his horse's nose, leaving the end tied in a hard knot about the neck close to the horse's head. His pony, crazy with excitement, needed no guiding rein; he knew what was expected of him. Then, when he had crowded his quarry to the last inch his pony could gain, the boy launched his rope in the air. The loop dropped straight over Steeldust's outstretched head and with a quick jerk he pulled it tight before it slipped back to the animal's shoulders.

The boy knew that the instant the gray felt the pull of the rope about his neck, if he had not forgotten his early training, he would in all probability swing round, face his pursuer, and become once more a broken horse.

But he was taking no chances, and as the rope pulled up he leaned forward, slapped his horse on the side of his head with his hat, thus forcing him to swing sharply to the left and away from the gray, and tightened the rope with a sudden jerk which rasped some hair from the pony's neck and jaws but brought the captured one up sharply.

Recalling that fateful day in the corral, with the keen-cutting whip making long welts on his satin sides, Steeldust swung quickly round and came straight up to the other horse with a look of inquiry on his face, as if to ask what on earth all this fuss was about. As the boy slipped from the back of his horse the gray went strong to the end of the rope again, but the other horse stood stock-still, receiving a fearful wrench on his neck. Carefully the boy worked his way along the rope to the now fairly docile animal, stroked him gently on the soft white nose, slipped his hand up along the side of his head and along his neck; meantime, in a voice that could be poured over a waffle, calling him all the flattering names in his boyish vocabulary.

Two hours later he rode into the freighter's camp, the proudest boy in northern Arizona, with Steeldust, the noted outlaw, at one end of his rope, his own saddle pony at the other, and fifty dollars in hard cash in plain sight.

THE EXPERIMENT OF A CHRISTIAN DAILY

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON

I

AT the close of the year 1899, the Twentieth Kansas Regiment, after its famous record in the Philippines during the Spanish War, was being reviewed on the Topeka State House grounds, and the whole city was out to see it. With a number of friends I happened to be watching the event from the home of the owner of the *Topeka Daily Capital*.

After the review was over and people had begun to go away, the conversation turned, I do not remember how or why, to that part of the story, *In His Steps*, in which there is a description of the attempt of a newspaper man to do everything as he believed Jesus would do it in the management of a daily paper.

It was the general opinion expressed by the friends who were discussing the subject that any such attempt was so visionary that it could not be carried out in actual practice. One or two thought it might be possible up to a certain point, but all believed that people were not ready for it, and that whoever tried it would not be able to make it pay financially.

As the discussion went on, everyone present grew more and more interested, until the proprietor of the *Capital* said to me, in jest, as I supposed, 'How would you like to try the experiment, for one week?'

I answered him in the same vein, saying that it would be interesting. And in reply he said that he was in

earnest, and went on to state the terms under which the *Topeka Daily Capital* might be turned over to me for one week in order that I might carry out my idea of what a Christian daily ought to be.

These terms as finally discussed included the following general agreements, which were carried out almost without change: —

The entire paper for one week to be under my direction with the understanding that nothing would be done to jeopardize the property or the future of the paper.

The entire working force of the paper to remain intact, including the mechanical, editorial, reportorial, and office force.

Advertising rates to be on the basis of circulation, but weekly subscription-rates to be twenty-five cents instead of ten cents, which was the regular city and local rate, in order to cover outside expenses and foreign postage.

The editor's rulings to be accepted in every department, including advertising matter, all editorial and submitted articles; and also in matters of personal conduct which involved such practices as the use of tobacco, drink, and profanity.

'News' was defined as any event worth knowing or telling, always published in the right proportion to its real importance.

All prize fights, scandals, crime, vice,