

tailor and verse milliner, sure, but them words o' yourn "Bout heedn' the coyotes' cryin' 'will have to be struck out. Nobody ever heeded the cryin' of a coyote unless he was a tenderfoot. Ye might work that line of talk off on them folks at your old home back East, but ye can't put anythin' like that over with this bunch."

"You're right, old man," said a tall, bronzed fellow, who had been on the wind-swept prairie several years; "them coyotes' yells might make a man turn over in his blankets, if he wasn't a sound sleeper, but he wouldn't be scared bad enough to get up and say his prayers if he'd forgotten them. No, Jim's verse just won't do, and 'tain't true."

So Jim's "Tribute to the Prairie Adventurers" came to a full stop.

If vers libre had been in vogue in those days as it is to-day, some lone prairie Edgar Lee Masters would likely have given forth something like this, of course without reference to the auto:

Lines To My Old Ox Team

Slow-moving, ponderous and always in low gear,
You get me there, you white-faced steers;

You always think, I know
Before you set one foot before the other,
But that's your way and I am content.
Men with prancing steeds pass us by
On the trail every day;

But, say, you don't-care-a-cuss pair
I like you and your ways.
There isn't any more happiness in speed
Than in your crawling, you long-horned breed.

Why do they haste these men of steam,
gasoline and equines?

Is there some haven of content, that lures
them on at break-neck speed?

Ah, nix on that happiness by speed stuff;
You and I my old ox-team can travel
just as fast

Toward the Depot of Content, in our slow
ancient way,

As these chaps who make the old world
reel

To the jarring of many cylinders and
high gears.
Me for the ox.

A young "bull-puncher" in our outfit who had aspirations to make himself a poet—he hadn't been born one—was observed one evening sitting by the camp fire evidently in distress of mind. It transpired that he had been wrestling with the Muse, for in the morning, scribbled on a sheet of white birch bark and in characters suggestive of a thumbnail dipped in tar or a burnt match, were the following doggerel lines nailed to the box of his freighting wagon.

Who's the scamp that caused this war?
Louis Riel!
Who's the chap we're gunning for?
Louis Riel!
I would steal your bucking bronce,
I would thump you on the "conk"—
No wild goose for you would "honk,"
Louis Riel!
With my thumb nail dipped in tar
Louis Riel!
Your pass for parts afar
Louis Riel!
I would sign and have you go,
Your exit would not be slow—
You'll not have to shovel snow,
Louis Riel!

The Great Land-Seeking Trek

In the early eighties, on the Western prairies, all trails led toward the Rocky Mountains. Most everyone was looking for land in those days, and perhaps it may have been that they wanted to view the landscape with the setting sun smiling good-night on it—at all events, everybody journeyed in search of land toward the sundown point of the compass. Land right at hand did not appeal to the home-seeking adventurers. Some imaginary beautiful and sheltered valley, away off in the great beyond, drew them on and on. A wanderlust and the love of faring forth into the uncharted and vast areas of virgin prairie, possessed them.

It was no mad rush such as takes place when a reservation is thrown open for homesteading, but, rather, a crawling movement in which the old ox-team bulked largely. There were, indeed, many adventures on the prairie trails in the West. There were innumerable sloughs

and creeks to be crossed, in an overland trek, from the muddy Red River to the foothills of the Rockies, and some of those adventurous land-seekers went clear across the plains and only stopped when the tongues of their wagons were jammed right up against the big mountain range. Only for the adamant obstruction they'd have gone clear to the deep waters of the Pacific.

Advice on Driving Oxen

I was camped one day beside Boggy Creek or Cussed Creek or Weed Creek, resting up after an arduous period of travel, when a young Englishman came along the trail with a pair of white-faced and rather skittish young oxen, and a covered wagon, loaded to the gunnels with settler's effects. The young land-seeker was travel stained and weary, and observing that there was water, grass and company to welcome him, decided to halt and make camp. He had made the trip all alone from Winnipeg, been mired a dozen times, and had broken the tongue of his wagon off in one of the many bog-holes he had crossed. He was still, as the saying is, "right up on the bit" and anxious to peg out a claim for himself and, incidentally for posterity, in the far West. We ate together, smoked and talked and naturally our conversation turned to oxen.

"These bally brutes of mine just don't seem to respond readily to 'Gee' and 'Haw,' and if one uses the whip, why, don't you know, they seem to get offended and run so as to spill the load," he informed me.

I tried to show him that the business of driving oxen was one of the fine arts and that an ox-driver had to be mighty careful how he punctuated his remarks to his team, particularly when the punctuation marks were put in with a buckskin whip-lash.

"Why, blyme, they're just cattle, aren't they?" he came back.

Sure thing, I replied, they're just cattle as you say, but this great country is very democratic and here, even the cattle sometimes have notions of doing things off their own bat. You've got to humour the critters if you want to get the best out of them.

"Humour 'em, eh? Well I've been licking 'em most all the three hundred miles we've travelled," he confessed. "How would one go about this humouring, that's what I would jolly well like to know?"

Pat 'em occasionally, I says, and rub their noses and say a few kind words to them once in a while.

"By jove, you know, that does seem the right thing, doesn't it? Why shouldn't a man make pets of his oxen just as most men do with their horses. I'll practise that."

Some time after I saw him going across the creek bottom where he had his white-faced pair tethered with stout ropes. I was too far away to hear the monologue but later he came over to my tent.

"Would you believe it," he said, "those critters of mine, as you Westerners name them, met me half-way. Why one of 'em even licked my hand. It's blymed lonesome sometimes, too, and this talking to one's oxen would seem like having company."

Now when you get in a tight place, I advised, don't cut loose with the buckskin. Just talk emphatically and crack the whip. It may be necessary at times to put on emphasis.

"Swear," he says.

Well most Canadian oxen savvy a vocabulary of that kind, I replied.

"I can do it," he says, "if put to it, but, you see, in England, it's considered running to bad form to speak profanely. But, of course, when one gets set down in a mud-hole it alters the case some."

That same evening I heard him litting an English love-song as he staked out his team on new pasture, and he told me that he had decided to change the names of his cattle from the alliterative titles of Brag and Bluster, to Jo and Jolly, as he felt that the former were not expressive of cordiality and good fellowship.

"Now about that vocabulary for driving oxen, is that easily fetched up with," he asked.

Easiest thing in the world, I answered. First time you see one of these wild and woolly Western Canucks stuck in the mud with an ox-team, just get within earshot and you'll hear him running the

gamut of wordy notes. Finest combination of blasphemy and expression to be heard in all the world, is from the tobacco-stained lips of an ox-driver, you know. As a forceful linguist and juggler of words blasphemous, the bull-puncher is without a peer.

Next morning my whilom friend decided to hit the trail and Jo and Jolly waded the creek, under the new dispensation, like a pair of veterans. From the solid ground beyond, the driver waved his hand to me and then set off on the westward trek.

An Ox-Race on the Plains

I recall memories of an occasion when I was camped beside a crossing at a far west creek along with half-a-dozen or more adventurers on the trail. A discussion arose over the speed merits of our ox-teams when one lanky bull-puncher referred to another's team thus: "Them cattle o' yours, pardner, jest mark time on the trail to eternity. Why ye've got to look close to know ye ain't always standin' still."

"An' I don't see them critters o' yours speedin' up so as they'd keep a graveyard procession in sight, either," the other came back with a snap.

The outcome was a race—an ox race. A half mile course was measured off on the prairie and the disputants astride their "nigh" oxen, lined up for the speeding event.

The racers went off from a standing start and came across the prairie, at times trotting, then galloping, with the jockeys waving their hats, slapping their fliers with their open hands and yelling like Comanche Indians in a war charge. Never graceful of movement an ox in quick motion is about as awkward and cumbersome a bunch of motive power as is to be seen on earth, but he gets there.



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It was a neck and neck race, and just at the end of the course, one of the horned steeds veered from the track and stepped in a badger hole, throwing himself and his rider.

Neither was hurt and the ridiculousness of the whole affair suddenly dawned upon us all, and it ended in everybody laughing fit to split.

Just fancy a city man—and there were many of them from the East and also the Old Land—starting out on a land-hunt on the trail with oxen. Likely any of them hadn't seen an ox-team before they landed at Winnipeg, and as for driving the critters, why they weren't even qualified for the kindergarten class. These tenderfeet had never heard the words "Gee" and "Haw" and the "nigh" and "off" side had no meaning to them when applied to oxen.

They tell of a young Englishman, who, on Main Street, Winnipeg, was an ox-driver for the first time. He shouted "Gee" when he meant "Haw," and this is the way he backed out.

"Ah, I beg your pardon, you bally brutes, I say 'Haw'."

Crossing creeks and muddy sloughs was, indeed, no slight undertaking with a green, unused-to-the-trail ox team. It was sure no knitting socks in an old ladies' home sort of job, but required a man to be all alive. Put into a boggy place for the first time, an ox-team was very likely to try to make the nearest hard ground and would often swing about suddenly—the result would be an upset wagon or a broken tongue. But an expert driver could do wonders by the persuasive powers of voice and discretionary movements of the whip—but a tenderfoot, ye gods, it was sure some sight to see one negotiate his first difficult crossing.