

POYNTON— Of Sayre's Range

By M. S. WADE



"LOOK at what's arrived!" drawled Lester Rayson to his companions. Five men were seated in the bar of the village hotel, variously occupied in sipping drinks or telling yarns or reading the day-old Calgary paper left by the last commercial traveller to pass that way. A slight diversion had been provided by the arrival of Number Three, one of the two daily trains from the East. Most of the other idlers had gone over to the station as soon as the engine tooted for the crossing, but these others preferred the chairs in the bar-room.

It was too early in the season for summer visitors. The Alberta foot-hill village of "The Ferry" enjoyed a Lilliputian reputation as an inland watering place, a resort where the folk from Calgary might send their wives and kiddies for the pure air that a thousand or so feet above sea level ensures.

It was yet May and this particular edition of "Number Three" only landed one passenger. He carried a small suit-case in his hand, a monocle stuck in his right eye, and wore a well-worn but still passable tweed suit, cloth cap to match, yellow leggings, tan shoes, and a briar pipe in his mouth.

The newcomer stared about him, and as the train pulled out gazed after it half regretfully.

"Goin' to the hotel?" queried Jack Charlesby, bar-keep, day and night clerk, tout and proprietor of the one hotel, THE hotel.

"Such is my intention, my man; where—?" he began, bringing his monocled optic to bear upon the elongated form of Jack.

"Just across the road. This is the way," answered Jack, anticipating the question and leading the way. The newcomer followed, casting wondering glances from side to side as he trudged along close at the heels of his guide. Gusts of wind stirred up dense clouds of gritty dust, but between gusts he could see what little there was to be seen—the straggle of houses, the stores, the school-house in the distance, a new church in the other distance and quite close at hand, straight before him, the hotel, with the hitching rail in front. Inside in the combination bar-room and office, Lester Rayson, the traveller and the other cronies, looked up.

"Look at what's arrived!" whispered Rayson.

His friends lifted their eyes, stopped whistling, and looked, mouths agape. Jack Charlesby winked solemnly at them as he passed behind the bar again.

"Well, I'm damned!" murmured Tom Wright, eyes still fixed upon the doorway.

"That's a new one on me!" observed a third, huskily, Bill Snell.

"Take something?" asked Jack, sliding a glass along the counter and one hand already extended expectantly in the direction of a row of bottles of case goods. There being no immediate response, he looked at his guest and recognized in his puzzled expression an utter failure of the simple words conveying their meaning.

"Have a drink?" he interpreted.

"Thanks, very much. A little Scotch, please."

Jack slid the bottle of Black Label to within an inch of the empty glass; drew some fresh water in another glass, and stood it alongside the whiskey bottle, and when his guest had poured out his drink, took a little of the same himself.

"How!" he exclaimed, with a nod. The guest had raised his glass to his lips. He lowered it again.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, questioningly.

"How? Oh, I see!" laughed Jack, good naturedly. "That's the way we sometimes say 'your health,' or 'good luck!'"

"Good luck!" returned the stranger.

As soon as the twain had disappeared to show the stranger his room. Lester and his friends made for the register and read the newly written name, the ink not yet dry.

"Alfred Poynton."

Presently Charlesby and Poynton descended from the bed-room and the trio, now seated around the stove, heels resting on the iron rail that ran around three sides of the huge receptacle for fuel, could hear the drone of their voices approaching. They entered the room.

"Boys," said Charlesby, "Mr. Poynton is thinking of sticking around here if he can find a job. He has a notion to go punching cows. Perhaps you know if he can get on anywhere?"

"Round up next week ought to make chances good," remarked Rayson. Then addressing Poynton, he asked, "Done any cow-punching?"

"No," admitted Poynton, frankly. "But I can ride and if I'm told what to do I think I can manage all right, wot?"

"Better come up and see the old man to-morrow," said Rayson.

"That's no good," interposed Tom Wright. "I asked him for a job myself only yesterday and he said that he didn't need more help just now."

"Too bad," commiserated Rayson. "Watson's are full up; always lots of breeds in that outfit, anyway. Say, Poynton," he added, after a moment's pause. "I know the man for you. Ride with me in the morning and we'll go to see him!"

"Thanks awfully, gentlemen," replied Poynton, dropping his monocle for a moment. "Will you all do me the pleasure of taking a drink with me?"

As one man they advanced to the bar and Charlesby again fascinated the new-comer with his dexterous handling of glasses and bottles.

"Got a hoss?" enquired Snell, hoarsely, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"It is my hope to be furnished with an animal by the stockraiser I obtain work with," replied Poynton, mildly.

"That's right enough, but if you ain't got no hoss how are you goin' to ride to the range in the morning?"

"UMMMM! Yes, to be sure. Ummmm!" mused Poynton, with dropped jaw. "Perhaps I may be able to hire a horse at a livery stable here!" he added, brightening.

"Which you might if there was, but there ain't," answered Snell, with his customary total disregard of grammatical rules.

Poynton's face fell.

"Well, I can walk, then. I'm pretty well used to it—lately," he said.

"Walk be damned!" ejaculated Wright. "I guess

you can use my roan mare for a couple of days."

And so it was settled.

"But what can I do with a man like that?" querulously enquired Frank Sayre, of the Summit Ranch, when Rayson, having taken him aside, suggested that he give Poynton a job for a few weeks. "You know—"

"Oh, that's all right, Frank," replied the other; "the poor devil is up against it and I'd have the old man take him on, but you know how damned set he is against green Englishmen; can't speak civilly to one. Be a sport, Frank."

"Oh, if that's the way of it I'll give him a show," answered Sayre, "but—" and he shook his head dubiously.

Poynton gave a sigh of relief.

POYNTON got along famously with Sayre. He was clumsy, and did most things wrong, often testing his employer's patience to the limit, but he was so good-natured that he quite won Sayre. In the evenings the two men talked of many things; mostly of cattle; often of England. Of himself, Poynton spoke rarely. When the conversation became personal he shut up like an oyster.

At the round-up he was the butt of all the smart Alecks among the cow-punchers and their name was legion. He took it all quietly enough. Sometimes old Frank thought he saw a flash behind his damned monocle that he would keep in his right eye, rain or shine. Big Dick Curno, who was just as mean as any man it was ever my misfortune to meet, always said the things that made the flash come into Poynton's eyes. He seemed to take a great deal of pleasure in trying to take the shine out of the "cheechako," but he was so goldarn mean over it that none of the boys cared for his style of play. Do what he could, though, he always failed to get the stranger's goat.

"Don't you mind that gink, Big Dick," said old Frank to him one day.

"That rotter Curno?" remarked Poynton, questioningly. "Oh, no! He is not worth it."

"That's right, son," observed the old man, eyeing his man keenly from beneath those shaggy grey eyebrows of his. "He's rough with his tongue, but he's still rougher with his hands and feet."

Poynton looked at him kind of quick. "Thanks," he said, and went on filling his pipe.

The ranges in British Columbia are pretty hard to ride. Even at the Summit the land is so rolling—I am speaking of the ranges in the vicinity of The Ferry—that a cow and a calf may be within a hundred yards of a cowboy and yet be plumb out of sight, and stay that way, too, unless he takes the trouble to ride around every knoll. This means that at a round-up the country has to be combed thoroughly. Well, as luck would have it, the Englishman took the trouble to go around a knoll that Curno said he had been around and that there was not a hoof there. Rayson was with them when they came into camp. He had joined them just as Poynton