

They stood obediently in line but each with cup or glass outstretched to the limit, while Mike rolled the scanty supply critically in the bottle and made a rapid calculation as to its distribution. Shaking the bottle so as to wet the cork, he removed the latter and carefully dropped a few drops into Big Bill's cup, who eyed the result ruefully, scornfully.

"Silent," he said to that worthy, "four drops every four years for you."

To Orson, who was bald, he said: "Externally fer you, Orson; if you can find it, use it fer a hair tonic."

To Rough-house Joe he said: "Not to be taken before meals, or at meals, or after meals." Here the liquid gave out and he shook the cork over the next cup.

"Lady," he said to Wah-na-gi, "I'll guarantee no one will git drunk or disorderly. Boys," he said, turning to them, "I'll bet there's a name in all our minds this night, and it's the absent owner of this ranch. Here's to 'im and, wherever he is this night, let's hope his heart is with us. I ask you to drink a merry Christmas to the boss."

The boys extended their drinking vessels and gave vent to vociferous yaps in the approved cowboy style, and drank, or did their best to drink, to the health of the absent boss. Then Mike, with his eyes sparkling and with a most elaborate manner, walked up to the centre of the room, glanced toward the closet, and said:

"And I'll ask him to respond to the toast in person."