

CHAPTER IV

CRAZY Uncle Alf was one of God's accidents, in the opinion of Big Country folks. He was deemed a bit touched, but whether by mere mortal infirmity or by some mysterious power beyond ken no man dared speculate. They said he was so all-fired uncertain. Like a sudden bitter wind of winter, he was wont to sweep in from the void of range country, blast souls afraid and pass on. Now he would be summoning Two Moons sinners to repentance; overnight he had quit the town on a borrowed horse, and the following sunset would see him calling blessings on the lonely ranch house, fifty miles away, which he had chosen to harbor and refresh him. In heat and storm Uncle Alf fared over the face of the wilderness, scourging and purging souls with the whips of Pentateuch.

The spirit of the wilderness moved him, even as the holy men of old. Big winds down from