



## The Two-Gun Man

(BY STEWART EDWARD WHITE.)

Author of "The Blazed Trail" and "Gold."

Illustrated by George Gibbs.

(Copyrighted, 1913, by the Newspaper Enterprise Association.)

I.—The Cattle-Rustlers.

Buck Johnson was American-born, but with a black beard and a dignified manner that had earned him the title of Senor. He had drifted into the southwestern Arizona in the days of Cochise and Geronimo. He had persisted, and so in time had come to control the water—and hence the grazing—of nearly all the Soda Spring Valley. His troubles were many and his difficulties great. There were the ordinary problems of lean and dry years. There were also the extraordinary problems of devastating Apaches, rising for early and late range rights—and cattle-rustlers.

For Senor Buck Johnson lived just north of that terra incognita filled with the mystery of a double chance of death from man or the flaming desert known as the Mexican border. There by natural gravitation gathered all the desperate characters of three states and two republics. He who rode into it took good care that no one should get behind him, lived warily, slept light, and breathed deep when once he had again sighted the familiar peaks of Cochise's Stronghold.

Of cattle-rustling there were various forms. The boldest consists quite simply of running off a bunch of stock, hustling it over the Mexican line, and there selling it to some of the big Sonora ranch owners. Generally this sort means war. Also are there subtler means, grading in skill from the skulking through a brand, to the various methods of separating the cow from her unbranded calf. In the course of his task, Buck Johnson would have to do with them all, but at present he existed in a state of warfare, fighting an enemy who stole as the Indians used to steal. Buck Johnson did his best, but it

was like stopping with sand the innumerable little leaks of a dam. Did his riders watch toward the Chiricahuas, then a score of beef steers disappeared from Grant's Pass, forty miles away. Pursuit here meant leaving cattle unguarded there. It was useless, and the Senor perceived that sooner or later he must strike in offense.

For this purpose he began slowly strengthen the forces of his riders. Men were coming in from Texas. They were good men, addicted to the grass-ropes, the double cinch, and the ox-bow stirrup. Senor Johnson wanted men who could shoot, and he got them.

"Jed," said Senor Johnson to his foreman, "the next son of a gun that rustles any of our cows is sure loading himself full of trouble. We'll hit his trail and we'll stay with it, and we'll reach his cattle-rustling conscience with a rope."

So it came about that a little army crossed the drift fences and entered the border country. Two days later it came out, and mighty pleased to be able to do so. The rope had not been used.

"No use, Buck," said Jed, "we'd any of us in on a gun play, but we can't buck the desert. We'll have to get someone who knows the country."

"That's all right," suggested Parker; "there's Perez, a suggested Parker; 'It's the only town down near that country.'"

"Might get someone there," agreed the Senor.

Next day he rode away in search of a guide.

The third evening he was back again, much discouraged.

"The country's no good," he explained. "The regular inhabitant's a set of Mexican bums and old soaks. The women's all from north, and don't know nothing more than we do. I found lots who claimed to know that country, but when I told 'em what I wanted they shied like a colt. I couldn't hire 'em for no money to go down in that country. They ain't got the nerve."

That night a bunch of steers was stolen from the very corrals of the home ranch.

For the first time Buck Johnson lost his head and his dignity. He ordered the horses.

"I'm going to follow that thief, into Sonora," he shouted to Jed Parker. "This thing's got to stop."

"You can't make her, Buck," objected the foreman. "You'll get held up by the desert; and if that don't finish you, they'll tangle you up in all those mountains down there, and ambush you and massacre you."

"I don't give a hang," exploded Senor Johnson, "if they do. No man can slap my face and not get a run for it."

Jed Parker commended with himself.

"Senor," said he at last, "it's no good; you can't do it. You got to have a guide. You wait three days and I'll get you one."

Johnson pulled loose his latigo. His first anger had cooled into a sullen rage. "All right," he agreed, "and you can say for me that I'll pay five thousand

dollars in gold and give all the men and horses he needs to the man who has the nerve to get back that bunch of cattle and bring in the man who rustled them."

So Jed Parker set out to discover his man with nerve.

II.—The Man With Nerve.

At about ten o'clock on the fourth of July a rider topped the summit of the last swell of land, and looped his animal down into the single street of Perez.

The newcomer raised nothing, but fixed his eye again on the raging man with the knife. "Don't you reckon he's bluffing?" he inquired.

"Not any," denied the other, with emphasis. "He's just drunk enough to

be crazy mad and reckless."

The newcomer shrugged his shoulders, and cast his glance scornfully at the man who spoke.

"The Mexican approached, flashing his white teeth."

"Here," said the stranger, "lend me your knife a minute."

He lunged his coat on his saddle, shouldered his way through the press, which parted for him readily, and the picked up the other corner of the handkerchief. "Now, you many son of a gun?" said he.

III.—The Agreement.

Jed Parker straightened his back, rolled up the bandanna handkerchief and thrust it into his pocket, hit flat with his hand the tumbled mass of his hair, and thrust the long hunting knife into its sheath. "You're the man I want," said he.

Instantly the two-gun-man had jerked loose his weapons and was covering the foreman.

"I go you," he snarled.

"Not just that way," explained Parker. "My gun is on my horse, and you can have this old toad-sticker if you want it. I been looking for you and took this way of finding you. Now let's go talk."

The stranger looked him in the eye for nearly a half-minute without lowering his eyes.

"I go you," said he briefly at last.

"I'm looking for a man with nerve," explained Parker, with equal succinctness. "You're the man."

"Well?"

"Do you know the country south of here?"

"The stranger's eyes narrowed.

"Proceed," said he.

"I'm foreman of the Lazy Y of Soda Springs Valley range," explained Parker. "I'm looking for a man with sand enough and sabb of the country enough to lead a posse after cattle-rustlers in the border country."

"I live in this country," admitted the stranger.

"So do plenty of others, but their eyes tick out like two in oysters when you mention the border country. Will you tackle it?"

"What's the proposition?"

"Come out and see the old man. He'll put it to you." They moved of the day. The desert compassed them about, marvelously changing shape and color and every character with all the newness of phantasmagoria. At even-ness of the desert stars shone steadily and unwinking, like the flames of candles. By moonrise they came to the home ranch. The two men unsaddled their horses and turned them loose in the wire-fenced "pasture," the necessary noises of their own movements sounding sharp and clear against the velvet hush of the night. After moment they walked stiffly past the bunk houses and the tall windmill silhouetted against the sky, to the main building of the home ranch under its cottonwoods.

There a light still burned, for this was the third day, and Buck Johnson

awaited his foreman.

Jed Parker pushed in without ceremony.

"Here's you man, Buck," said he. The stranger had stepped inside and carefully closed the door behind him. The lamp-light threw into relief the bold free lines of his face, the details of his costume powdered thick with alkali, the shiny butts of the two guns in their open holsters tied at the bottom. Equally it defined the resolute countenance of Buck Johnson turned up in inquiry. The two men examined each other—ad liked each other at once.

"How are you?" greeted the cattle-man.

"Good evening," responded the stranger.

"Sit down," invited Buck Johnson. The stranger perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, with an appearance less of embarrassment than of habitual alertness.

"You'll take the job?" inquired the Senor.

"I haven't heard what it is," replied the stranger.

"Parker here."

"Very well," said Buck Johnson; he paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. "There's too much cattle rustling here. I'm going to stop it. I've got good men here to take the job, but no one who knows the country south. Three days ago I had a bunch of cattle stolen right here from the home ranch of corrals and by one man at that. It wasn't much of a bunch—about twenty head—but I'm going to make a starter right here and now. I'm going to get that bunch back, and the man who stole them, and I'm going to do the same with every case of rustling that comes up from now on. I don't care if it's only one cow. I'm going to get it back every trip. Now, I want to know if you'll lead a posse down into the south country and bring out that last bunch and the man who rustled them."

"I don't know," hesitated the stranger.

"I offer you five thousand dollars in gold if you'll bring back those cows and the man who stole 'em," repeated Buck Johnson, "and I'll give you all the horses and men you think you need."

"I'll play her a hard hand," promptly.

"Good!" cried Buck Johnson, "and you better start tonight—right now."

"Better yet. How many men do you want, and grub for how long?"

"Alone!" exclaimed Johnson, his countenance visibly cooling. "Alone! Do you think you can make her?"

"I'll be back with those cattle in not more than ten days."

"And the man," supplemented the Senor.

"And the man," argued the stranger. "What's more, I want that money here when I come in. I don't want to stay in this country over night."

"What's more," grinned overboard Buck Johnson's countenance. He understood.

"Climate not healthy for you?" he hazarded. "I guess you'd be safe enough all right with us. But suit yourself. The money will be here."

"That's agreed!" insisted the two-gun man.

"Sure."

"I want a fresh horse—I'll leave mine—here's a good one. I want a little grub."

"All right. Parker'll fit you out."

"I'll see you in about ten days."

"Good luck," said Buck Johnson, wishing him.

V.—The Accomplishment.

The next morning Buck Johnson took a trip down into the "pasture" of five hundred wire-fenced acres.

"He means business," he confided to Jed Parker on his return. "That cavalier of his is a heap sight better than the Shorty horse we let him take."

In the meantime the regular life of the ranch went on. Each morning Sang, the Chinese, rang the great bell summoning the men. They ate, and then

awaited his foreman.

Jed Parker pushed in without ceremony.

"Here's you man, Buck," said he. The stranger had stepped inside and carefully closed the door behind him. The lamp-light threw into relief the bold free lines of his face, the details of his costume powdered thick with alkali, the shiny butts of the two guns in their open holsters tied at the bottom. Equally it defined the resolute countenance of Buck Johnson turned up in inquiry. The two men examined each other—ad liked each other at once.

"How are you?" greeted the cattle-man.

"Good evening," responded the stranger.

"Sit down," invited Buck Johnson. The stranger perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, with an appearance less of embarrassment than of habitual alertness.

"You'll take the job?" inquired the Senor.

"I haven't heard what it is," replied the stranger.

"Parker here."

"Very well," said Buck Johnson; he paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. "There's too much cattle rustling here. I'm going to stop it. I've got good men here to take the job, but no one who knows the country south. Three days ago I had a bunch of cattle stolen right here from the home ranch of corrals and by one man at that. It wasn't much of a bunch—about twenty head—but I'm going to make a starter right here and now. I'm going to get that bunch back, and the man who stole them, and I'm going to do the same with every case of rustling that comes up from now on. I don't care if it's only one cow. I'm going to get it back every trip. Now, I want to know if you'll lead a posse down into the south country and bring out that last bunch and the man who rustled them."

"I don't know," hesitated the stranger.

"I offer you five thousand dollars in gold if you'll bring back those cows and the man who stole 'em," repeated Buck Johnson, "and I'll give you all the horses and men you think you need."

"I'll play her a hard hand," promptly.

"Good!" cried Buck Johnson, "and you better start tonight—right now."

"Better yet. How many men do you want, and grub for how long?"

"Alone!" exclaimed Johnson, his countenance visibly cooling. "Alone! Do you think you can make her?"

"I'll be back with those cattle in not more than ten days."

"And the man," supplemented the Senor.

"And the man," argued the stranger. "What's more, I want that money here when I come in. I don't want to stay in this country over night."

"What's more," grinned overboard Buck Johnson's countenance. He understood.

"Climate not healthy for you?" he hazarded. "I guess you'd be safe enough all right with us. But suit yourself. The money will be here."

"That's agreed!" insisted the two-gun man.

"Sure."

"I want a fresh horse—I'll leave mine—here's a good one. I want a little grub."

"All right. Parker'll fit you out."

"I'll see you in about ten days."

"Good luck," said Buck Johnson, wishing him.

V.—The Accomplishment.

The next morning Buck Johnson took a trip down into the "pasture" of five hundred wire-fenced acres.

"He means business," he confided to Jed Parker on his return. "That cavalier of his is a heap sight better than the Shorty horse we let him take."

In the meantime the regular life of the ranch went on. Each morning Sang, the Chinese, rang the great bell summoning the men. They ate, and then

awaited his foreman.

Jed Parker pushed in without ceremony.

"Here's you man, Buck," said he. The stranger had stepped inside and carefully closed the door behind him. The lamp-light threw into relief the bold free lines of his face, the details of his costume powdered thick with alkali, the shiny butts of the two guns in their open holsters tied at the bottom. Equally it defined the resolute countenance of Buck Johnson turned up in inquiry. The two men examined each other—ad liked each other at once.

"How are you?" greeted the cattle-man.

"Good evening," responded the stranger.

"Sit down," invited Buck Johnson. The stranger perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, with an appearance less of embarrassment than of habitual alertness.

"You'll take the job?" inquired the Senor.

"I haven't heard what it is," replied the stranger.

"Parker here."

"Very well," said Buck Johnson; he paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. "There's too much cattle rustling here. I'm going to stop it. I've got good men here to take the job, but no one who knows the country south. Three days ago I had a bunch of cattle stolen right here from the home ranch of corrals and by one man at that. It wasn't much of a bunch—about twenty head—but I'm going to make a starter right here and now. I'm going to get that bunch back, and the man who stole them, and I'm going to do the same with every case of rustling that comes up from now on. I don't care if it's only one cow. I'm going to get it back every trip. Now, I want to know if you'll lead a posse down into the south country and bring out that last bunch and the man who rustled them."

"I don't know," hesitated the stranger.

"I offer you five thousand dollars in gold if you'll bring back those cows and the man who stole 'em," repeated Buck Johnson, "and I'll give you all the horses and men you think you need."

"I'll play her a hard hand," promptly.

"Good!" cried Buck Johnson, "and you better start tonight—right now."

"Better yet. How many men do you want, and grub for how long?"

"Alone!" exclaimed Johnson, his countenance visibly cooling. "Alone! Do you think you can make her?"

"I'll be back with those cattle in not more than ten days."

"And the man," supplemented the Senor.

"And the man," argued the stranger. "What's more, I want that money here when I come in. I don't want to stay in this country over night."

"What's more," grinned overboard Buck Johnson's countenance. He understood.

"Climate not healthy for you?" he hazarded. "I guess you'd be safe enough all right with us. But suit yourself. The money will be here."

"That's agreed!" insisted the two-gun man.

"Sure."

"I want a fresh horse—I'll leave mine—here's a good one. I want a little grub."

"All right. Parker'll fit you out."

"I'll see you in about ten days."

"Good luck," said Buck Johnson, wishing him.

V.—The Accomplishment.

The next morning Buck Johnson took a trip down into the "pasture" of five hundred wire-fenced acres.

"He means business," he confided to Jed Parker on his return. "That cavalier of his is a heap sight better than the Shorty horse we let him take."

In the meantime the regular life of the ranch went on. Each morning Sang, the Chinese, rang the great bell summoning the men. They ate, and then

awaited his foreman.

Jed Parker pushed in without ceremony.

"Here's you man, Buck," said he. The stranger had stepped inside and carefully closed the door behind him. The lamp-light threw into relief the bold free lines of his face, the details of his costume powdered thick with alkali, the shiny butts of the two guns in their open holsters tied at the bottom. Equally it defined the resolute countenance of Buck Johnson turned up in inquiry. The two men examined each other—ad liked each other at once.

"How are you?" greeted the cattle-man.

"Good evening," responded the stranger.

"Sit down," invited Buck Johnson. The stranger perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, with an appearance less of embarrassment than of habitual alertness.

"You'll take the job?" inquired the Senor.

"I haven't heard what it is," replied the stranger.

"Parker here."

"Very well," said Buck Johnson; he paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. "There's too much cattle rustling here. I'm going to stop it. I've got good men here to take the job, but no one who knows the country south. Three days ago I had a bunch of cattle stolen right here from the home ranch of corrals and by one man at that. It wasn't much of a bunch—about twenty head—but I'm going to make a starter right here and now. I'm going to get that bunch back, and the man who stole them, and I'm going to do the same with every case of rustling that comes up from now on. I don't care if it's only one cow. I'm going to get it back every trip. Now, I want to know if you'll lead a posse down into the south country and bring out that last bunch and the man who rustled them."

"I don't know," hesitated the stranger.

"I offer you five thousand dollars in gold if you'll bring back those cows and the man who stole 'em," repeated Buck Johnson, "and I'll give you all the horses and men you think you need."

"I'll play her a hard hand," promptly.

"Good!" cried Buck Johnson, "and you better start tonight—right now."

"Better yet. How many men do you want, and grub for how long?"

"Alone!" exclaimed Johnson, his countenance visibly cooling. "Alone! Do you think you can make her?"

"I'll be back with those cattle in not more than ten days."

"And the man," supplemented the Senor.

"And the man," argued the stranger. "What's more, I want that money here when I come in. I don't want to stay in this country over night."

"What's more," grinned overboard Buck Johnson's countenance. He understood.

"Climate not healthy for you?" he hazarded. "I guess you'd be safe enough all right with us. But suit yourself. The money will be here."

"That's agreed!" insisted the two-gun man.

"Sure."

"I want a fresh horse—I'll leave mine—here's a good one. I want a little grub."

"All right. Parker'll fit you out."

"I'll see you in about ten days."

"Good luck," said Buck Johnson, wishing him.

V.—The Accomplishment.

The next morning Buck Johnson took a trip down into the "pasture" of five hundred wire-fenced acres.

"He means business," he confided to Jed Parker on his return. "That cavalier of his is a heap sight better than the Shorty horse we let him take."

In the meantime the regular life of the ranch went on. Each morning Sang, the Chinese, rang the great bell summoning the men. They ate, and then

awaited his foreman.

Jed Parker pushed in without ceremony.

"Here's you man, Buck," said he. The stranger had stepped inside and carefully closed the door behind him. The lamp-light threw into relief the bold free lines of his face, the details of his costume powdered thick with alkali, the shiny butts of the two guns in their open holsters tied at the bottom. Equally it defined the resolute countenance of Buck Johnson turned up in inquiry. The two men examined each other—ad liked each other at once.

"How are you?" greeted the cattle-man.

"Good evening," responded the stranger.

"Sit down," invited Buck Johnson. The stranger perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, with an appearance less of embarrassment than of habitual alertness.

"You'll take the job?" inquired the Senor.

"I haven't heard what it is," replied the stranger.

"Parker here."

"Very well," said Buck Johnson; he paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. "There's too much cattle rustling here. I'm going to stop it. I've got good men here to take the job, but no one who knows the country south. Three days ago I had a bunch of cattle stolen right here from the home ranch of corrals and by one man at that. It wasn't much of a bunch—about twenty head—but I'm going to make a starter right here and now. I'm going to get that bunch back, and the man who stole them, and I'm going to do the same with every case of rustling that comes up from now on. I don't care if it's only one cow. I'm going to get it back every trip. Now, I want to know if you'll lead a posse down into the south country and bring out that last bunch and the man who rustled them."

"I don't know," hesitated the stranger.

"I offer you five thousand dollars in gold if you'll bring back those cows and the man who stole 'em,"