



# The COW PUNCHER

By Robert J.C. Stead

Gulcher  
Kitchener and other poems

Illustrations by Irvin Meyer

## SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Living with his father on a small, badly managed ranch, David Elden has reached the age of eighteen with few educational advantages. An accident to the auto in which Dr. Hardy, eminent eastern physician, and his daughter Irene, are touring the country, brings a new element into his life. Dr. Hardy's leg is broken, and he is necessarily confined to his bed. Friendship, and something more, develops between Irene and David.

The shadows had deepened into darkness, and the infinite silence of the hills hung about them as they dropped from their saddles at the Elden door. A light shone from within, and Doctor Hardy, who was now able to move about with the aid of a home-made crutch, could be seen setting the table, while Mr. Elden stirred a composition on the stove. They chatted as they worked, and there was something of the joy of little children in their companionship. The young folks watched for a moment through the window, and in Dave's heart some long-forgotten emotion moved momentarily at the sight of the good-fellowship prevailing in the old house. Irene, too, was thinking; glimpses of her own butlered home, and then this background of primal simplicity, where the old cowboy cooked the meals and the famous specialist set the plates on the bare board table, and then back of it all her mother, sedate and correct, and very much shocked over this mingling of the classes.

"Well, you youngsters must have this country pretty well explored," said Doctor Hardy, as they entered the house. "Where was it today—the prairies, the foothills or the real fellows behind?"

"The canyon up the river," said Irene, drawing off her sweater. "What's the cats? Gee! I'm hungry! Getting pretty supple, Daddykins, aren't you?"

"Yes, an' I'm sorry for it, miss," said the old rancher, "not wishin' him any harm, or you, neither. We was jus' talkin' it over, an' your father thinks he's s'pry enough for the road again. Ain't ever goin' to be like it used to be after he's gone, an' you."

"We'll be sorry to go," said the doctor. "That's what I've been saying all day, and thinking, too. If misfortunes can be lucky, ours was one of that kind. I don't know when I've enjoyed a holiday so much. What do you say, girl?" he asked, as he rested an arm on her round, firm shoulder and looked with fatherly fondness into the fine brown of her face.

"I've never known anything like it," she answered. "It's wonderful. It's life." Then with a sudden little scream she exclaimed: "Oh, daddy, why can't you sell your practice and buy a ranch? Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"Your mother might not see it that way," he replied and her eyes fell. Yes, that was the obstacle. She would have to go back to the city and talk by rule, and dress by rule, and behave by rule, and be correct.

"It's been a good time," the doctor continued, when they had commenced supper, "but I've already overstayed my holiday. I feel I can travel now, and my leg will be pretty strong by the time I am back east. If Dave will oblige us by going to town tomorrow and bringing back some one who can drive a car, we will be able to start the following morning. I will just take the car to town, and either sell it there or ship it."

The following morning found Dave early on the trail, leading a saddled horse by his side. The hours were leaden for the girl all that day and, looking into the future, she saw the specter of her life shadowed down the years by an unutterable loneliness. How could she ever drop it all—all this wild freedom, this boundless health, this great outdoors, this life, life—how could she drop it all and go back into the little circle where convention fenced out the tiniest alien streamlet, although the circle itself might lie deep in mire? And how would she give up this boy who had grown so imperceptibly but so intimately into the very soul of her being—give him up with all his strength and virility and, yes, and coarseness, if you will, but sincerity, too—an essential man, as God made him—in exchange for a machine-made counterfeit with the stamp of Society? Deeply did she ponder these questions, and as the day wore on she found herself possessed of a steadily growing determination

that she would not follow the beaten trail, let the by-paths lead where they might.

Darkness, save for a white moon, had settled over the foothills when the boy returned with another young man. The stranger ate a ravenous supper, but was not too occupied to essay conversation with Irene. He chose to call her cook.

"Swell pancakes, cook," was his opening remark. "Can you find another for yours truly?"

She refilled his plate without answer.

"Used to know a girl mighty like you," he went on. "Waitress in the Royal Edward. Gee! but she was swell! A pippin! Class? Say, she had 'em all guessing. Had me guessing myself for a while. But just for a while." He voiced these remarks with an air of intense self-approval more offensive than the words.

Irene felt the color rise about her neck and cheeks and run like an overflowing stream into her ears and about her hair. It was evident that, for a second time, Dave had chosen to say nothing to strangers about her presence at the ranch. Her father and Mr. Elden were in Dave's room; Dave had stopped eating, and she saw the veins rising in his clenched fists. But the challenge was to her, and she would accept it; she felt no need of his protection.

"Fill your stomach," she said, passing more pancakes; "your head is hopeless."

He attempted a laugh, but the meal was finished in silence. The stranger lit a cigarette and Irene went to the door with Dave.

"Come for a walk," he whispered. "The horses are tired, so let's walk. . . . It's our last chance."

She ran for her sweater and rejoined him in a moment. They walked in silence down a path through the fragrant trees, but Dave turned from time to time to catch a glimpse of her face, white and fine as ivory in the soft light. He had much to say, but he was tongue-tied under the spell of her beauty.

"You squelched him, all right," he broke out, at length.

"Just in time, too, I think," she replied. "I was watching your hands."

He smiled a quiet but very confident smile. "Reenie," he said, "that fellow makes me sick. All the way out he talked about girls. He's a city chap an' wears a white collar, but he ain't fit to speak your name. Another minute an' I'd 'a' had 'im by the neck." He seized a spruce limb that stuck across their path. It was the size of a stout stick, but he snapped it with a turn of his wrist. It was very tough; it oozed sticky stuff where he broke it. "His neck," he said, between his teeth, "jus' like that."

They reached an open space. Something black—or was it red?—lay on the ground. Dave bent over it a moment, then looked up to her white, clear face, white and clearer than ever since witnessing the strength of his hate.

"It's a calf," he said, as calmly as he could. "Half 'et up. Wolves, I guess."

"The poor, poor thing!" she breathed. "The poor, innocent thing! Why did it have to die?"

"It's always the innocent things 'at suffers," he answered.

"Always the innocent things," she repeated mechanically. "Always—"

She sprang to her feet and faced him. "Then, what about the justice of God?" she demanded.

"I don't know nothin' about the justice of God," he answered bitterly. "All I know is the critter 'at can't run gets caught."

There was a long pause. "It doesn't seem right," she said at length.

"It ain't right," he agreed. "But I guess it's life. I see it here on the prairies, with every livin' thing. I guess I was like that, some. I've been caught. I guess a baby ain't responsible for anything, is it? I didn't plet my father or my mother, did I? But I got to bear it."

There was something near a break in his voice on the last words. She felt she must speak.

"I think your father is a wonderful old man," she said, "and your mother must have been wonderful, too. You should be proud of them both."

"Reenie, do you mean that?" he demanded. His eyes were looking straight into hers.

"Absolutely," she answered. "Absolutely I mean it."

"Then I'm goin' to say some more things to you," he went on rapidly. "Things 'at I didn't know whether to say or not, but now they've got to be said, whatever happens. Reenie, I haven't ever been to school or learned lots of things I should 'a' learned, but ain't a fool, neither. I didn't learn to break all those bottles in a day. Well, I can learn other things, too, an' I will, if only it will take me across. I'm goin' to leave this old ranch, some way, jus' as soon as it can be arranged. I'm goin' to town an' work. I'm strong; I can get pretty good wages. I've been thinkin' it all over, an' was askin' some questions in town today. I can work days an' go to school nights. An' I'll do it—if it'll get me across. You know what I mean. I ain't askin' no pledges. Reenie, but what's the chance? I know I don't talk right, and I don't eat right—can't try not to notice but you couldn't help—but, Reenie, I think right, an' I guess with a girl like you that counts more than eatin' and talkin'."

She had thought she could say yes or no to any question he could ask, but as he poured forth these plain, passionate words she found herself enveloped in a flame that found no expression in speech. She had no words. She was glad when he went on:

"I know I'm only a boy an' you're only a girl. That's why I don't ask no pledges. I leave you free, only I want you to stay free until I have my chance. Will you promise that?"

She tried to pull herself together. "You know I've had a good time with you, Dave," she said, "and I've gone with you everywhere, like I would not have gone with any other boy I ever

knew, and I've talked and let you talk about things I never talked about before, and I believe you're true and clean and—and—"

"Yes," he said. "What's your answer?"

"I know you're true and clean," she repeated. "Come to me—like that—when I'm a woman and you're a man, and then—then we'll know."

He was tall and straight, and his shadow fell across her face, as though



"Reenie," He Said, "Kiss Me."

even the moon must not see. "Reenie," he said, "kiss me."

For one moment she thought of her mother. She knew she stood at the parting of the ways; that all life for her was being molded in that moment. Then she put both arms about his neck and drew his lips to hers.

## CHAPTER III.

Dave's opportunity came sooner than he had expected. After the departure of the Hardys things at the old ranch were, as both father and son had predicted, very different. They found themselves on a sort of good behavior—a behavior which, unhappily, excited in each other grave suspicions as to purpose. The tension steadily increased, and both looked forward to the moment when something must give way.

For several weeks the old man remained entirely sober, but the call of the appetite in him grew more and more insistent as the day went by, and at last came the morning when Dave awoke to find him gone. He needed no second guess; the traveling had become irresistible and his father had ridden to town for the means to satisfy it. The passing days did not bring his return, but this occasioned no anxiety to Dave. In the course of a carouse his father frequently remained away for weeks at a stretch.

He moped around the ranch buildings, sat moodily by the little stream, casting pebbles in the water, or rode over the old trails on which she had so often been his companion.

Then the old man's horse came home. Dave saw it coming up the trail, not running wildly but with nervous gallop and many sidelong turnings of the head. As the boy watched he found a strange emptiness possess him; his body seemed a phantom on which his head hung over-heavy. He spoke to the horse, which pulled up, snorting, before him; noted the wet neck and flanks, and at last the broken stirrup. Then, slowly and methodically, and still with that strange sensation of emptiness, he saddled his own horse and set out on the search.

After the last rites had been paid to the old rancher, Dave set about at once to wind up his affairs, and it was not until then that he discovered how deeply his father had been involved. The selling of the cattle and the various effects realized only enough to discharge the liabilities, and when this had been done Dave found himself with a considerable area of unmarketable land, a considerable bundle of paid bills and his horse, saddle and revolver. He rode his horse to town, carrying a few articles of wear with him. It was only after a stiff fight that he could bring himself to part with his own companion. The last miles into town were ridden very slowly, with the boy frequently leaning forward and stroking the horse's neck and ears.

He sold horse and saddle for sixty dollars and took a room at a cheap hotel until he should find work and still cheaper lodgings.

In the evening he walked through the streets of the little cow town. I snubbed him with its indifference. . . . He became aware that he was very lonely. He realized that he had but one friend in the world; but one, and of her he knew not so much as he addressed. . . . He began to wonder whether he really had a friend at all, whether the girl would not discard him when he was of no further use. Just as he had discarded his faithful old horse. Tears of loneliness and remorse gathered in his eyes, and a mist not of the twilight blurred the street lamps now glimmering from their poles. He felt that he had treated his horse very shabbily indeed. He wanted old Stop-eye back again. He suddenly wanted him with a terrific longing; wanted him more than anything else in the world. For the moment he forgot the girl and all his hardships centered about the beast which had been so long his companion and servant and friend.

"I'll buy him back in the mornin'; I will, sure as h—l," he said, in a sudden gust of emotion. "We got to stick together. I didn't play fair with him, but I'll buy him back. Perhaps I can get a job for him, too, pullin' a light wagon or somethin'."

The resolution to "play fair" with Stop-eye gradually restored his cheerfulness and he walked slowly back to the hotel.

The men's sitting room now presented a much more animated picture than when he had registered earlier in the evening. It was filled with ranchers, cowboys and cattlemen of all degrees—breeders, buyers, traders, owners and wage earners, with a sprinkling of townspeople and others not directly engaged in some phase of the cattle business. Soon he was in a group watching a gaudily dressed individual doing a sort of sleight of hand trick with three cards on a table.

"Smooth guy, that," said someone at his side. The remark was evidently intended for Dave, and he turned toward the speaker. He was a man somewhat smaller than Dave, two or three years older, well dressed in town clothes, with a rather puffy face and a gold-filled tooth from which a corner had been broken as though to accommodate the cigarette which hung there.

"Yes," said Dave. Then, as it was apparent the stranger was inclined to be friendly, he continued, "What's the idea?"

The stranger nudged him gently. "Come out of the bunch," he said in a low voice. When they had moved a little apart he went on, in a confidential tone: "He has a little trick with three cards that brings him in the easy coin. He's smooth as grease, but the thing's simple. Oh, it's awful simple! Now you watch him for a minute," and they watched through an opening in the crowd about the table. The player held three cards—two red ones and a black. He passed them about rapidly over the table, occasionally turning his hand sideways so that the onlookers could see the position of the cards. Then he suddenly threw them face down on the table, each card by itself.

"The trick is to locate the black card," Dave's companion explained. "It's easy enough if you keep your eye on the card, but the trouble with these rubes is they name the card and then start to get out their money, and while they're fumbling for it he makes a change so quick they never see it. There's just one way to beat him. Get up close, but don't say you're getting interested. Then when you're dead sure of a card crack your fist down on it. Glue yourself right to it and get out your money with the other hand. When he sees you do that he'll try to bluff you, say you ain't in on it; but you just tell him that don't go, this is an open game, and he's got to come through, and the crowd'll back you up. I stuck him once—a whole hundred first crack—and then he barred me. Watch him."

Dave watched. Saw the black card go down at one corner of the board; saw a bystander fumbling for a five-dollar bill; saw the bill laid on the card; saw it turned up—and it was red.

"That is so-o-oth," he said. "I'd 'a' sworn that was the black card."

"So it was—when you saw it," his companion explained. "But you were just like the sucker that played him. You couldn't help glancing at the jay getting out his money, and it was in that instant the trick was done. He's too quick for the eye, but that's how he does it."

Dave became interested. He saw two or three others lose fives and tens. It was plain his companion's tip was straight. There was just one way to beat this game, but it was simple enough when you knew how. He sidled close to the table, making great pretense of indifference, but watching the cards closely with his keen black eyes. The dealer showed his hand, and the black card flew out to the right. This was Dave's chance. He pounced on it with his left hand, while his other plunged into his pocket.

"Sixty dollars on this one," he cried, and there was the triumphant note in his voice of the man who knows he has beaten the other at his own game.



"You Ain't Playin'!" Said the Dealer. "You Ain't In on This."

"You ain't playin'," said the dealer. "You ain't in on this."

"That don't go," said Dave very quietly. "You're playin' a public game here, an' I chose to play with you this once. Sixty dollars on this card." He was fumbling his money on the table.

"You ain't playin'," repeated the dealer. "You're a butt-in. You ain't in this game at all."

"Sure he's in," said the crowd. "That ain't right," whined the dealer, "but you got it on me. Turn 'er up."

The card was red. Dave looked at it stupidly. It was a moment or two before he realized that his money was gone. Then, re-

gardless of those about, he rushed through the crowd, flinging bystanders right and left, and plunged into the night.

He walked down a street until it lost itself on the prairie; then he followed a prairie trail far into the country. The air was cold and a few drops of rain were falling in it, but he was unconscious of the weather. He was in a rage through and through. Stop-eye was now a dream, a memory, gone—gone. Everything was gone; only his revolver and a few cents remained. He gripped the revolver again. With that he was supreme. No man in all that town of men schooled in the ways of the West was more than his equal while that grip lay in his palm. At the point of that muzzle he could demand his money back—and get it.

Then he laughed. Hollow and empty it sounded in the night air, but it was a laugh, and it saved his spirit. "Why, you fool," he chuckled, "you came to town for to learn somethin', didn't you? Well, you're learnin'. Sixty dollars a throw. Education comes high, don't it? But you shouldn't kick. He didn't gox you in, an' gave you every chance to back away. You butted in and got stung. Perhaps you've learned somethin' worth sixty dollars."

In his innocence of the ways of the game it never occurred to him that the friendly stranger who had showed him

how to play it was a friend of the sharper, and probably at this moment they were dividing his sixty dollars—the price of old Stop-eye—between them.

(Continued in Next Issue)

Wanted to buy both your fat and stock hogs. O'Bannon and Neuswanger. Phone 71. 18tf

## REAL ADVERTISING

There is a young man in Greenfield, Indiana, whose name is Bill White, Jr., and some day he is apt to be a copy writer in an agency. The school master is willing to give Billy this publicity, because it is a pretty sure bet if he ever does become one of that great body of men who describe for the benefit of the whole public the sort of merchandise which will serve them best, he will be a sincere copy writer.

Witness what is, perhaps his first piece of copy, from the Greenfield Daily Reporter. It has descriptive power, sincerity and surely there is no overstatement in his offer to pay a "small reward."

LOST—Will some little boy or girl find my kittle for me? It is a Maltese, has white throat and four white feet. I will pay a small reward, or take you to the show. Billy White, Jr.—Printer's Ink.

Snuff boxes now adorn glass cases in the museums; and taking snuff became obsolete without a constitutional amendment.

# Watch for Announcement of Public Sale on

MONDAY, MARCH 21

Nine miles east of Alliance.

TWENTY-NINE HEAD OF CATTLE  
FINE LOT OF FARM MACHINERY

FREE LUNCH AT NOON

P. O. Muntz, Owner

H. P. Coursey, Auct. Chas. Brittan, Clerk

# Do You Like Good Ice Cream?



## Then These Prices Will Appeal to You

WE'VE lowered the prices on many popular confections, and leave it to your judgment if they don't attract you. Remember they are for

### SATURDAY SPECIALS ONLY

Any Plain Ice Cream Soda	10c and tax—11c	Any Plain Ice Cream Sundae	10c and tax—11c
Pie	10c	Fruit Ice Cream Sodas	17c
Fruit Sundae	17c	Malted Milk	17c
Coco Cola	5c	Lemonade	17c
Green River	8c	Malted Milk Float	22c

### HEY, KIDS—C'MON IN!

Ice Cream Cones 4c and War Tax

TRY OUR PLATE LUNCHES

F. J. BRENNAN