

stirrups, and the reins held high and loose. With a pressure of their knees they had their mounts galloping in a stride, and they wheeled and halted them just as swiftly.

Small wonder that I improved in such company, and was soon throwing the stragglers and would-be deserters back into the herd with great abandon. It did not do, though, to throw them back too hard, for that caused them to panic in another direction. For instance, imagine the bunch of cattle as a clockface, with Jose pointing the way at 12 o'clock. Supposing a few animals give trouble, say, at 8 o'clock, and the cowhand chases them back into the herd too wildly, what happens is that their impetus starts a forward rush which ends in a breakaway at 2 o'clock.

Usually at the rear of a herd there would be several young calves who were finding the journey a tax on their powers. If any became too exhausted and could not keep up with the rest, they were allowed to drop out, and their anxious mothers with them, to follow at their leisure. The little fellows often found it rather heavy going, I'm afraid, for they were obliged to flounder and swim in many places where the bigger ones walked.

This particular bunch did not give much trouble, and we reached the salt trough in good time. Although empty, it did not need refilling, for the new arrivals would mix with the other cattle already there, and would not be tempted to stray back again.

* * *

It was a two hours' ride back to the ranch house, and on the way I experienced my first tropical storm. The rain fairly lashed down, and visibility was blotted out beyond a hundred yards. The outfit were all provided with a pauncho, or long waterproof cloak, which fastens round the neck, and is full enough to spread over the horse's quarters; but nothing short of a diver's suit would have kept that rain out. Not that it mattered much, anyway, because galloping through the swamp had already made us just about as wet as we could be, and a little extra moisture made no appreciable difference. In fact, I rather welcomed it, because it bathed my many mosquito bites for me. I wondered, too, what happens to the little blighters when they get mixed up with a rainstorm like that.

Hill's spirits were certainly not affected by the downpour, for he started singing a song with an endless number of verses; or perhaps it was the same verse all the time, because I couldn't catch the words very well; but, anyway, it had to do with Red-headed Sal, who was somebody's best gal, and it lasted him all the way home.

It seemed strange to eat at a table again and use knives and forks and plates, but there was nothing strange about the feel of my little iron bedstead, half an hour afterwards. Walter, whose room was next to mine, came in to say good-night.

"I guess it's you for the 'big sleep' to-night, son," he said, snuffing out the candle. I had already guessed as much myself, and we were both dead right.

* * *

NEXT day was New Year's Day, a general holiday, and was remarkable for the number of strange faces to be seen. They weren't strange, really, but contact with a razor made them look a little different, that was all. Walter, who had gone the whole hog with a haircut as well, looked almost indecently

bare. The women, who I thought would have spread themselves with a vengeance on this occasion, were all in black; in memory of Mr. Ramsey, of course. There is nothing like a good funeral or wedding to liven things up in those parts. Old Ramsey's burial celebrations had lasted about a fortnight. There had been plenty to eat and drink; no work to do; and everybody had helped his neighbour to overcome a common grief.

It was very pleasant to sit quietly in the shade of the trees, listening to Mac and Walter, and watching the fast-flowing Paraguay swirl past. They told me a great deal about the fazenda, about the special circumstances connected with it, and about life generally in Matto Grosso. Everything they treated with an easy, practical philosophy, which contrasted strongly, and I thought, very favourably, with the anxious hopes and fears of modern city life. Both men owed their presence there to adversity rather than choice, and although Mac himself never mentioned his earlier activities, his conversation revealed a depth of knowledge which had not been gained only by raising cattle. Walter, on the other hand, was not at all reticent, and on this and subsequent occasions, I was royally entertained by his reminiscences. They are best repeated in small doses, and a good one to start with explains why he left the United States, where he was a cow-puncher in Montana. Walter Hill blames another man's garrulity for that move.

"When a guy keeps right on talkin', talkin', talkin'," he said, "sooner or later he's going to saying somethin' which another guy won't agree with, an' then you can figure on there being trouble. Like it was with this feller. Me an' him didn't think the same way about a certain matter, an' pretty soon he got to call me names which I didn't hold with. So I had to take a crack at him. But I guess the booze had made him a bit loose, so he started reachin' for his gun, which is mostly a dangerous thin' to do when you're in a fightin' temper, 'cos somebody's liable to get hurt. So I takes a hold of mine pretty lively, and gives him a bang with the butt on his head where his hat wasn't. There wasn't no more trouble after that, 'cos they put me in the jail an' him to bed. After 10 days they let me out, but next day the feller croaked, an' they told me about an hour before they told the sheriff. You bet I lit out of that town like a bat out of hell, an' didn't stay in no place very long till I was aboard a freighter bound for B.A."

(To be continued next week)

AFTER an absence from New Zealand of six years, Cushla de Lange sang recently from 12B. Those who remembered her as a 12B "personality quest" winner with a rich contralto voice were surprised to hear a dramatic soprano. This change followed her years of tuition in Melbourne under Adolf Spivakovsky. Miss de Lange has studied several languages, for it is her ambition to sing in the Metropolitan Opera, and she has appeared in many stage productions, including J. C. Williamson's *The Waltz Dream*, in Melbourne. During the war she has been busy with Red Cross and patriotic work, appearing at camp concerts. A special broadcast which she recently made from 12B has been recorded and will be heard shortly from other ZB stations. A photograph appears on page 16.



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