

Shepherds For Science

by W.C. Tuttle



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ME AND Dirty Shirt Jones prods our three burros across the border of Yaller Rock County, points north through the country where God dumped the leavings after He made the Bad Lands, and has visions of the old home town.

Me and Dirty has abandoned the idea of finding gold where she ain't, and right now we're herding our sore-footed jassacks towards the flesh-pots of Piperock town.

We're cutting around the side of a hill, when all to once we discerns the figure of a man setting on a rock ahead of us.

He looks a heap like he was figuring out the why and whatfor of all things. He humps there in the sun, a long, lean, pathetic-looking figure, despondency showing even in the curves of his cartridge-belt. I feels sorry for him long before our lead burro halts before him and lets us arrive.

The figure raises its head, peers at that gray burro, and when we stop he gets to his feet, turns to us and snaps:

"Hold up your hands! Both of you!"

Me and Dirty jerks our hands above our heads, and this fretful-looking *hombre* with the good-by forever mustache and weary eyes squints at us and says—

"You both solemnly swear to uphold the law vested in you as deputy sheriffs of Yaller Rock County, so help you Gawd?"

Me and Dirty nods and puts down our hands.

"Now," says Magpie Simpkins, sheriff of Yaller Rock County, "I feel a danged sight better."

We nods again, sets down beside him, and rolls smokes. After while Magpie scratches his nose and pinches out the light of his cigaret.

"What you doing here—hunting snakes?" asks Dirty.

Magpie shakes his head and digs into the dirt with his heels.

"Of course it ain't none of our business," says I, "but I would like to know why you inoculates us with sheriffitis without warning."

"Sheep," says he, soft-like. "Just sheep, Ike."

"Which there never was nor never will be," states Dirty. "You mean just plain sheep, don't you, Magpie?"

"That is as may be, Dirty."

Magpie fingers his mustache, and nods.

"Well," says I, "me and Dirty hankers for home, so I reckon we might as well drift along, Magpie."

"No," says he, sad-like. "You ain't going no place, Ike. You're arrived. Do you reckon I deputized you for fun?"

"Sheep," pronounces Dirty, "don't mean nothing at all to me. I sure am contemptuous of all things pertaining to wool."

"Me, I votes against anything that blats," says I.

"I don't love 'em!" snaps Magpie. "Don't see me packing no sheep-dip to alleviate their sufferings, do you?"

We don't seem to, so we all sets there, humped over in the sun. After while Magpie clears his throat.

"'Alphabetical' Alien and 'Scenery' Sims own three thousand woollies," says he. "Scenery was a silent pardner, being as he's a cow-man, which hates sheep. Alphy gets Scenery to unhook a thousand dollars to buy some fancy stock. *Sabe?* Well, Alphy bought 'em—red, white and blue ones, in stacks, the same of which ain't productive none to speak about.

"Scenery chides Alphy to the extent that Alphy gets disgruntled and wishes to separate the herd, fifty-fifty, without considering the thousand he lost over the green cloth. Alphy contends that him and Scenery has agreed to suffer gains and losses together, and furthermore that he lost a lot of his own money at the same sitting, the same of which makes them feller sufferers.

"Such a open declaration causes some smoke and a little noise in Piperock, but neither of them gets shot up enough for us to declare a holiday. Scenery plasters a attachment on the herd, and then Alphy limps to Judge Steele's wickiup and prays for a receiver.

"Being as I'm the sheriff I has to serve said attachment, and also being as I'm a danged fool I'm appointed as the receiver. The county didn't elect me to herd sheep, gents. Over on the other side of that hill is the sheep. Somewhere over there is the tent. All very simple."

Magpie fusses with his mustache for a moment and then gets to his feet. He slaps our lead burro with his hat, and hitches up his belt.

"Come on, mules! Hump yourselves!"

"Where to, feller?" asks Dirty. "Them is our burros, Magpie."

"You won't need 'em," says he, weary-like, "so I'll take 'em home for you. All I ask is this: Take care of the sheep."

"Sheep?" I yells.

"S-h-e-e-p," he spells, counting the letters on the fingers of his left hand with the barrel of the gun in his right. "Just sheep, Ike. Keep—your—hands—off—that—gun!"

"Yea-a-a-a-h!" blats Dirty, excited-like. "Explain yourself, feller."

"You—" Magpie points at Dirty—"are the receiver. *Sabe?* I hereby makes you deputy

receiver of them sheep, and I honors Ike by making him deputy attacher. Ike always was attached to sheep. May the Lord have a little mercy on your souls, and—don't lose any sheep. Come on, canaries."

Me and Dirty sets there like a pair of mummies and watches that forlorn-looking *hombre* herd our long-eared rolling-stock across the hills. Dirty jerks a rock at a sand-lizard, and yanks his hat down over his ears. We glares at each other for a moment.

"Shepherd!" hisses Dirty. "You sheep attacher!"

"Ditto!" I hisses back at him. "You sheep-receptacle!"

If there ever was an age when jackrabbits spoke with tin-whistle voices Scenery Sims was a throw-back to that period. Him and Alphabetical Alien are two things, the same of which the dictionary designates as inanimate objects. If you can imagine a pair of ciphers with the rims rubbed out—you've got my opinion of them two *hombres* to a gnat's eyebrow.

"I'm going to kill Magpie Simpkins some day," says Dirty, mean-like.

"Uh-huh," says I. "That sounds like you, Dirty. You're always going to kill somebody the day after. You think too slow."

We sets there a while longer, and then Dirty yawns.

"Might as well find 'em, I reckon. You attach 'em and I'll do the receiving, Ike."

We pokes over the ridge, and after going about a mile we hears the voices of lamblets, and then we sees the teepee, which we deciphers to be the sheep-camp. In her callow youth she might have been a tent, but the wear and tear of sheeping existence has put her in the sere and yaller leaf, with a touch of color, where somebody's red-flannel shirt has patched up a hole in one side.

"Well," says Dirty, "she ain't much, but it's home, Ike."

"It is ever so humble," I agrees, and we slid down to it. As we walks up to the front the flap opens, and out comes the head of an inhuman being. This face is so classified, 'cause no human being could have so much hair on its face and still breathe—not without gills.

"Holee henhawks!" gasps Dirty. "Who have we here?"

"Aye am de ship-hoorder," comes from a hole in the hair.

"Bale of hay from Sweden!" gasps Dirty, and the hair opens again.

"Aye am de ship-hoorder."

"What a dugout for dandruff!" says I.

"Yah! Who are you fallers?"

"Your successors," says I. "You can tie up your war-sack and pilgrim."

"Haw?" He seems to think it over, and shakes his head.

"Aye tank Aye stay. Das iss my job. Aye am de ship-hoorder."

"You don't need to classify yourself," grins Dirty. "Nature tagged you. Us two are going to dry-nurse this bunch of animated socks and underwear, so you might as well kiss 'em a fond fare-thee-well."

The hairy one shakes his head, and peers at us out of a pair of little eyes.

"He say to me, 'O-o-o-laf, I gif you twanty dollar month.' He say dat an' Aye stay for one month. Fifteen day Aye stay today."

"This has been a long day for you, Olaf," agrees Dirty. "Ike, do you get that jargon?"

"Sure. Alphabetical or Scenery promised him twenty a month, and today makes fifteen days he has reigned,"

"No rain," says Olaf. "Dry as ——! Aye stay."

He ducked back under the tent, and a second later he sticks his head out again, and beside that bunch of hair is the muzzle of a rifle.

"Aye tank Aye stay," he announces, and ducks inside again.

"Defied by a barber-boycotter," grunts Dirty. "Are we bluffed, Ike?"

"Not from my point of view," says I. "You take one side and I'll take the other." There was four guy-ropes on each side, and it just took four kicks per each to make that tent unsupported, and the poor old thing comes down upon Olaf. Then me and Dirty assumes reclining positions, while Olaf wastes a few cartridges, wild-like.

Then he emerges from a hole in the wreck, in time to be mounted by Dirty Shirt, who rode that shepherd to the queen's taste. Olaf pitched considerable, but gave it up, and seemed receptive to civilized argument.

"Still think you'll stay?" asks Dirty.

"Val, Aye go pretty soon but Aye coom back now," pants Olaf, pawing the alkali out of his whiskers. "Aye boost somet'ing."

"You talk like you had," admits Dirty.

"Aye coom back—yah! Aye get de law."

"Yeah?" says Dirty. "Look at us, shepherd. We're the law. *Sabe?*"

He looks at us, and his whiskers seem a heap agitated.

"You—are—de—law?" he asks, deliberate-like.

"You are looking at it," grins Dirty. "How does she look?"

"Val—" he hitches up his rope belt, and picks up his war-sack—"val, Aye can say dis mooch: Yorge Hokansen hay say to me, 'O-o-o-laf, das country has too mooch bum law and no justice!' Yorge iss smart—you bet."

And me and Dirty stood there and watched the Hairy One fade out over the hills towards Silver Bend.

"I hope he forgets us before he loads up on alcohol," says Dirty. "I hate to chase even a shepherd off his job, but I reckon we're sort of shepherds-in-law, Ike, and we ain't to blame. Let's inventory the grub."

In the grub-box is one can of milk, one can of corn, a little coffee and a quart of raw alcohol.

Dirty nods over the assortment.

"That shepherd was good for fifteen days more, Ike, but the law sure is going to suffer internally. Let's put up the tent."

Olaf left too soon to enjoy the rain. She came down plentiful and awful, and demonstrated to us that red flannel ain't no ways water-proof. When the morning came we peers out into a wet world, and tries to dry out enough tobacco to make a smoke. Then cometh a interruption from without:

"Say, you lousy, slew-footed, blat-headed sheep-herder, come out here!"

"Somebody calling you, Dirty," says I.

"Not me, Ike. Somebody has been getting your mail."

"Coming out?" yells the voice again. "You sap-headed snake-hunter!"

"Talks like a cow-man," opines Dirty. "Maybe he's making us a visit."

Dirty throws the tent-flap open, and we gets a view of a feller on a roan bronco.

"Say, you ——" he begins, but he's looking down the muzzle of Dirty's gun, and his voice fails him.

"Speaking to me?" asks Dirty, soft-like.

"You better put down that gun," says he. "It might save you a lot of trouble."

"Yes," says Dirty, "and if it went off and killed you, feller, it would likely save you a lot of trouble, if this is the way you're in the habit of speaking to strangers. What seems to itch you?"

"Your sheep!" he yelps. "Half your danged woollies are over my line! You agreed to keep them stinking sheep this side of the Mesquite, and this morning I finds half of them across."

"You get 'em out of there pretty danged sudden-like or I'll massacre the bunch. *Sabe?*"

"You don't dare," opines Dirty.

"The — I don't! Just about why?"

"Against the law. Them sheep are within the law, mister."

"Yah? Well, let me tell you some thing, you lousy shepherd: I'll get my punchers and we'll show you! We'll chase 'em so far that —"

"Get off!" orders Dirty. "You're up so high I can't hear your voice."

He had a gun, but I reckon he also had a weak heart, so he got off and gave me his gun. I reckon he'd 'a' given us his weak heart, too, if we'd asked for it, 'cause Dirty has a nervous way of fingering a trigger.

"What in — are you going to do now?" he asks.

"Hoard ships," grins Dirty. "I'm ship-hoarder."

"Oh!" says he. "You're the Swede herder that 'Alcohol' Adams spoke about."

"What did he say?"

"Said you didn't have brains enough to wad a shotgun with."

"What do you think?" I asks.

"Well—" he looks at Dirty's gun, serious-like—"well, not to mean any offense, but I'd say that Alcohol exaggerated a little; he meant a twenty-two."

Be it known that Alcohol Adams is so ornery that his own dog barks at him. He'd steal money from his own kids, and then lick thunder out of them for losing it. Mosquitoes, horse-flies and rattlesnakes turn him down like a white chip in a no-limit stud game, and his soul is so small and elusive that he has to drink straight alcohol in order to exhilarate it.

Yaller Rock got so disgusted with him that they sent him to the Legislature, where he collected all the loose money in sight, and showed

his appreciation of things by passing a few laws favoring sheep. He orated his views in Piperock, the same of which was contrary to our religion, and—let me admit that some poor shooting was done.

When he hit Paradise there was three hunks of lead in the cantle of his saddle, which proved we held too low or the range was too great. We held a mass meeting that night, and Magpie Simpkins chided us over our lack of ability.

We agreed to set aside six practise shots per day, against the time that Alcohol or any other lawmaker might appear in our midst. I hopes you hereby *sabes* some thing of Alcohol's nature.

"You can't run no blazer on me," says this feller. "I'm 'Sandy' Sorenson. What you going to do?"

"Borrow your bronc," says Dirty. "We'll ride that roan double, Ike."

"Won't ride double," says he.

"Maybe it never has," corrects Dirty, taking his foot out of the stirrup. "Come up, Ike."

Sandy sure diagnosed that bronc right. I'd trail my bet with his when he says it won't ride double—not meek-like. A bronc can't do its best with two hundred and ninety pounds on its back, but I hope to gosh I never ride that bronc single-handed when it's riled.

Man, that animal done everything except fly, and at that the danged thing went high enough to convince the most skeptical that all it needed was a short pair of wings to make good in that respect. First it gives a correct imitation of a post-hole digger, and then it goes down that gully, changing ends like a whirligig. I've got my wish-bone hooked over Dirty's shoulder, and every hop I can feel my finger slipping higher and higher up that cantle.

Sandy rides a double-rig saddle, and when we hits the first turn of the gully I feels the rear cinch bust. From that on it's like riding a rocking-chair over sticks of dynamite.

The roan bucks along the edge of the washout, the bottom of which is about ten feet below us, and I just starts to yelp, "Don't get scared, Dirty; she won't buck down there," when we hit the bottom, and I bit my tongue over the first word.

My vertebrae comes together like a string of box-cars getting hit by a wild engine, and then we yanked out of there and went angling up the hill as fast as that bronc can run.

"Still alive?" I yelps.

"From my chin on up!" he yells. "Wonder what this fool wants to climb the hill for, Ike?"

"Can't you stop her?" I asks.

"Bridle's gone, Ike. Ha-a-a-ang on!"

We found out why the roan wanted to get a down-hill pull on us, 'cause as soon as we hit the grade the animal inaugurates a new style of bucking. Was it effective? Oh, man, I'd rise to remark it was. I just hung on and prayed. I used up all the white man's religion I ever heard about, and I'm just beginning to make medicine to the totem of the Alaskan Siwash when the cinch breaks.

I feels myself float into space, and then I goes out in a blaze of bright lights. After while Old Man Misery seems to come along and runs his fingers all over my carcass, and then I opens my eyes. I'm laying on my back with my feet up the side of a rock, and a short distance from me is Dirty, hanging by the back of his shirt to an old mesquite-snag.

Standing there beside a pair of packed burros is the queerest-looking pair of pelicans I ever seen. They're both wearing hard hats and black-rimmed specs, and what you might expect such persons to wear in the line of shirts, collars and neckties, but from the waist on down they're clad in chaps and boots.

One of 'em is wearing a pair of Mexican spurs—the kind with rowels the size of a dollar and eighty-five cents. One of them has a belt draped around his waist, and in the holster is one of them single-shot twenty-two pistols. The other is packing a pump shotgun.

One of 'em removes his specs and polishes 'em, careful-like.

"Quite remarkable, my friend!" says he. "Quite remarkable. The—er—equine was no doubt desirous of removing its burden."

"One would be led to accept such a theory," nods the other. "We have observed the effect, my dear Middleton, but of course we know nothing of the cause. It really was quite remarkable."

"Holee suffering scissorbills!" grunts Dirty, leaving half his shirt on the snag and staggering to his feet. He stares at them and at me.

"Ike, do you see the same thing I do?" he whispers.

"I hope so," says I, lowering my feet. "I hope I do, Dirty, otherwise I'm a goner mentally. Is one of them apparitions wearing spurs?"

"Thank ——!" gasps Dirty. "We see the same little details, Ike."

"You see, Pettingill?" crows one of 'em. "You objected to the boots and spurs, but the customs of a country must be observed. It is well."

"Perhaps they will enlighten us to the best of their ability," says Pettingill, adjusting his specs. "It will do no harm to inquire."

"My dear gentlemen," says the one called Middleton, "may we ask you a question?"

"You can take a chance," nods Dirty.

"Well—er—before I ask the question it might be well to introduce ourselves. I am Professor Middleton of Boston, and the gentleman with me is Professor Pettingill of Philadelphia."

"We appreciates it considerable," says Dirty, solemn-like. "I am of the Jones tribe, from here or hereabouts, and called Dirty Shirt. The person with me is a Harper offspring, called Ike. Where are you from, Ike?"

"There or thereabouts," says I.

"Exactly," says Professor Middleton. "Now the question is this: Pettingill and myself are dabbling in a few problems out side of our regular work, and this one has come to our notice: Are sheepherders really insane? Do they acquire insanity from their occupation? Is there anything about a—er—sheep that would cause a normal man to lose his mind, as it were?"

"Yes," nods Dirty. "It is."

"Exactly," says Middleton. "You are following me?"

"I hope nobody sees me if I do," grins Dirty.

"I contend that one's information on such a problem must come from personal observation and not from hearsay or opinions of others. We refuse to take circumstantial evidence, as it were. It seems that some of the natives are—well, a bit touchy on the subject. I asked a gentleman for his opinion, and he—well he ——"

"How so?" I asks.

"At your city of Silver Bend I approached a man who was clad in leather trousers, and I asked him if I could get a little information from him regarding sheep. I am sure my tones were not belligerent, and I properly introduced myself before propounding the question."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He did not answer. He deliberately crushed my hat over my nose and kicked my feet from under me."

"It is very true," nods the other one. "I—I thought perhaps we had met up with just the character we were investigating—a mentally

unbalanced sheep person. I soothed him to the best of my ability, begging him to curb his profanity. Thinking to humor him, I said—in kind tones:

“My dear fellow, there was no offense intended to you or your sheep. We all love the little lambs.”

“Then what?” asks Dirty.

“Well, it may have been a coarse way of describing it, but another fellow came along after the mentally unbalanced one had stridden away, and he said—

“My ——, what a mess!”

“Who told you that shepherds were all crazy?” asks Dirty.

“It has been said,” replies Professor Middleton. “We are investigating.”

“Just what does the word ‘crazy’ mean?” I asks.

“Crazy?” Professor Pettingill looks shocked at our ignorance. “Crazy means decrepit; weak; feeble; of weakened or disordered intellect.”

“Come to think of it,” remarks Professor Middleton, “that party who assaulted us was neither decrepit, weak nor feeble, Pettingill.”

“He was likely mad as ——,” opines Dirty.

“At least that is a good simile,” nods Pettingill.

“Just about where are you pelicans headed for?” asks Dirty.

“Headed for?” asks Pettingill. “Where are we going? We desire to locate as near as possible to the habitat of the shepherd. We purchased the mules from a person in Silver Bend, who assisted us in selecting our provender. He tied it securely on the mules, and we haven’t taken it off since because we are afraid we could not get it on again.”

“How long have you been in the hills?” I asks.

“Since yesterday morning.”

“Suffering scissorbills!” snorts Dirty. “You left them burros packed all night, ‘cause you—Say, you fellers ought to get jobs herding sheep. You sure qualify.”

“Ah!” says Middleton, pleased-like. “Do you—er—think it could be arranged?”

“To herd sheep?”

“Exactly. It would put us closely in touch with the subject. We could make a close study of the effects of the sheep animal upon the human brain. My dear Pettingill, that would be wonderful! Could it be arranged?”

“I’d rise and howl that it could,” says Dirty. “You get the job.”

“This is too good to be true!” exclaims Pettingill.

“The same to you and many of them,” says Dirty. “Hump yourselves, mules; we’re going home.”

Them professors seemed a heap interested in our rag house. They makes a lot of notes in their little books while Dirty lays a fire in the little sheet-iron stove. Then they wants to know where the sheep are.

“You fellers want to be regular shepherds, don’t you?” asks Dirty.

“Oh, certainly,” says Pettingill. “We’re prepared for the worst. I am anxious to get first-hand information on the subject. Professor Middleton and myself are never content to take hearsay evidence for any weighty subject.”

Being as we ain’t never seen the sheep ourselves, we has to trust to luck. We leads them pelicans to the top of a tall butte, and from there we gets a glimpse of the herd. Several hundred are feeding on the other side of a little creek, which we decipher to be Mesquite Creek.

“Now, what—er—procedure do we adopt?” asks Pettingill.

“Say that again,” says Dirty. “I missed it a foot.”

“What are we supposed to do in a case of this kind?”

“Oh ——!” says Dirty, and then he cranes his neck. “Look what’s going on down there!” We sees four punchers riding toward them sheep, sort of swinging around to get between them and the creek. They bunches the whole works, and proceeds to drift ‘em over the hill. I recognizes one of ‘em as Sandy Sorensen, on the roan, so I reckon it got home all right.

“Exactly,” nods Pettingill, wiping his glasses. “No doubt everything is all right, but just why are those men taking away our sheep?”

“Gents,” says Dirty, rolling a smoke, “you have witnessed the theft of a few hundred sheep. With your own eyes you have seen part of your herd swiped by outlaws. It is a common occurrence hereabouts.”

“Do you mean that we have been robbed in the broad light of day?” asks Pettingill, shocked-like. “You do? Well, I am amazed!”

“Yes,” says Dirty. “It is such things that help to make us crazy.”

Maybe I could tell more of this tale; maybe not. Professor Pettingill knows things that I don't, so I'll let him tell the rest of the tale as he told it to his friends. Folks, meet Professor Pettingill, who is now going to talk.

Mr. Harper's tale, up to the present, is partly true, or as Dirty Shirt says, "Near the truth as Ike ever told anything." I objected to the word "pelican" as applied to Professor Middleton and myself, but Ike assured me that it was a term of endearment, so I will let it remain.

Many of their quaint phrases are in my notebook, but as yet I have not had time to investigate their meaning. Their vocabulary of profanity seemed unlimited, and at times very amusing. It seems that they had little reverence for the finer things of life, and when we gently remonstrated with them, the one called Dirty Shirt said:

"Oh, go to ——! What do you think this is—ladies' cemetery?"

I as yet fail to see the reference to a burial-place.

As Mr. Harper has already told you, we sat on the slope of the hill and watched the outlaws purloin part of the flock. I believe that my ancestors were fighting-stock, for my gorge arose at the sight, and I was filled with visions of revenge. Perhaps it was the spirit of the West that possessed me, but at any rate I arose and shook a folded fist in their direction.

"Go ahead and cuss, professor," said Dirty Shirt. "If you get stuck for a word, maybe me or Ike can supply it."

Now, I am going to make no attempt to quote them. At times they talk in academic English, and at other times a jargon. Professor Middleton will bear me out in saying that their language is both weird and wonderful, and also easy to acquire.

I am sure that our friends were shocked at our conversation when we related our experiences, and it required constant vigilance over our tongues to keep from—as Ike said—"talking like a he-man." I feel that Middleton was a worse offender than I in that respect.

I said to Dirty Shirt—

"We shall most surely follow them and recover our property, shall we not?"

"Not," answered Ike. I am leaving off the prefix "Mr." as they rarely use it in conversation.

"But," said I, "it is a plain case of theft, is it not?"

"Well," replied Dirty Shirt, "you can call it anything from petty larceny to train robbery, professor, but I'll be —— if I ever was so fond of sheep that I'd sacrifice my skin in their interests."

"Do you mean you are going to let them keep the sheep?" asked Middleton.

"——'s delight!" exclaimed Dirty Shirt. "You still talking sheep? Let's go back to the rag shanty and scare up a feed."

So back we went. They showed no worry over the loss of the sheep, and I am certain they must be of value. The chops alone would be worth—But why quote prices? They led us back to the tent, and then Dirty Shirt said:

"If you pelicans want to be regular shepherds you've got to learn how to cook. See what you can find in your own packs and then scare up a batch of biscuits."

Our pack-luggage had been stacked in front of the tent, and as I walked over to investigate our provender Dirty Shirt added—

"Cook anything you see, 'cause my big insides are eating up the little ones."

He did not use the word "insides," but its vulgar equivalent.

"Scare up a biscuit?" asked Middleton. "How does one scare a biscuit?"

"Build a fire in the stove," said Dirty Shirt. "All you have to do is touch a match to the kindling, as the fire is all set. Then we'll show you the next step."

I went inside the tent, knelt beside the stove and scratched a match.

The sticks of wood over the kindling caught my eye. I removed one as I touched the match. One must betray ignorance to acquire knowledge, so I carried one out to them.

"Pardon me," said I, "but is this some new preparation to combat the scarcity of fuel?"

Dirty Shirt glanced at the stick, then at the smoke coming out of the small stove pipe, and then he and Ike grasped their hats in their hands and dashed away. It really was ludicrous.

"Come on, you —— fools!" cried Ike without stopping to explain.

"What an amazing thing to do!" exclaimed Middleton. "Why in the world are they ——"

It is of course ridiculous to say that the world came to an end before Middleton's question had been propounded, but that is what seemed to happen. The earth seemed to vomit dust, flame and smoke, and I seemed to feel myself being carried

away. Ages later I awoke. I turned my head, and then said to myself—

“Pettingill, you have been knocked topsy-turvy.”

I really had. I seemed to be trying to stand on my head in wet clay, although in reality I found that I was reclining, head down, on the side of a bank of what might be termed an abandoned water-course.

Modesty forbids that I tell what clothing is missing from my person. I managed to regain my natural poise, and turned sufficiently to allow my feet to slide down.

Near me is a section of the tent containing the red-flannel patch, and as I take stock of my surroundings that patch seemed to loosen, and from out through the aperture emerges the head of Professor Middleton.

“My dear fellow, are you all right?” I asked.

He looked at me in a dazed sort of a way, and then spat out—along with a mouthful of clay:

“Go to ——! What do you think this is—a ladies’ cemetery?”

I could readily see that he was speaking from his subconscious mind, quoting from Dirty Shirt’s reply to me. He got to his feet, not without visible effort, and we both looked at Dirty Shirt and Ike. Their gaze seemed inquiring, but I was as much at sea as they.

“We are still alive, as you may see,” I volunteered.

“Takes a lot of dynamite to kill a shepherd,” nodded Dirty.

“Dynamite?” asked Middleton. “A powerful explosive?”

“Concentrated ——,” nodded Dirty. “Regular old bustem quick. Some son-of-a-goat loaded the stove on us. Must ‘a’ been several sticks.”

“Five, I believe,” I replied. “Here is the sixth.”

I opened my hand and showed them a mass of what appeared to be fine sawdust and grease.

“My ——!” cried Dirty, not profanely. “The old dictionary-digger choked that stick to a mush! Don’t drop it!”

His order came too late. I suddenly realized what I was doing—what I had in my hands—and I cast it down as a deadly thing. Dirty and Ike seemed to sigh with relief, and then Dirty said:

“Lord, I ain’t got much religion. I don’t *sabe* nothing about Jonah and the Ark, but I sure hands

up thanks to whoever is to blame for blocking the trigger of that thing. Amen.”

“Have you any special creed or religious affiliations?” asked Middleton.

“No.” Dirty Shirt shook his head. “Not yet, but if you two are going to hang around this range for any length of time, I’m going to join something—that’s a dead cinch.”

“There was a cap in that stick, Dirty,” said Ike. “Wonder it didn’t go.”

“Uh-huh,” grunted Dirty. “There’s something that protects drunks and idiots, Ike.”

“Yes, Dirty, you’re right. Even them danged burros was removed far enough away to be safe. Drunks, idiots and jassacks—all under protection.”

He certainly was not referring to Middleton or myself, as neither of us ever touches liquor in any form.

Later on I insisted on knowing the probable destination of the sheep.

“Over in Sandy’s corral,” said Dirty Shirt. “Everything is grist that comes to his mill. He’ll demand payment for the range he thinks the sheep ate.”

“Oh, is he a miller?” asked Middleton.

Dirty and Ike exchanged glances, and Ike said—

“That’s what education does for a feller, Dirty.”

Education had little to do with it, as any one would know that no one but a miller would have need of grist, and he spoke of “his mill.” Dirty proved adept as a chef, and Middleton and myself enjoyed the first real meal since we left the dining-car. When it grew dark Ike kicked out the fire, leaving us in darkness. I remonstrated, but he said:

“Build you one if you want it, old-timer, but remember this: Any jasper who will load your stove won’t hesitate to shoot at night.”

We spread our blankets in the dark, and Ike and Dirty immediately fell to sleep. The novelty of looking at the stars, and the noises of the night kept Middleton and myself awake. I thought of the stolen sheep and we conversed in whispers.

“The loss of so many sheep must be greater than they care to acknowledge,” whispered Middleton. “They are like the American Indian inasmuch as they are stoical under loss or punishment. It would be wonderful if we could recover the sheep. I am beginning to like them, Pettingill.”

We shook hands over it, procured our shotgun and pistol, and stole away silently, except for the tinkle of Middleton's spurs.

We crawled out of hearing, got our bearings from the stars and started on our well-meant errand. We were going in single file along the side of a hill on a tiny path, which showed white in the dim light, when suddenly we were confronted by a gigantic figure.

It towered above us, a black hulk, coming at a fast walk. I tried to avoid the impact, but slipped and fell right into the path of the monster.

The next instant it fell over me and into Middleton. I retained my shotgun. I had no way of knowing the fate of poor Middleton, but I ran a short distance before I stopped.

I saw the silhouette of it against the sky and for the first time in my life I fired a gun. The impact of the shot threw me into a cactus-patch, and I feared for a time that it had crushed my lower jaw. I managed to tear myself away from the clinging barbs, and stood erect.

"Middleton!" I cried. "Professor Middleton!"

"Well, what in —— do you want!"

You can readily see that he was beginning to acquire the dialect of our associates.

"I shot it!" I cried. "I shot it!"

"Pettingill—" his voice was a bit sarcastic—"I will always thank the man who sold me these leather trousers. I didn't get hit with more than—let me see—Oh, I am unable to estimate."

"Heavens! Did I hit you, Middleton?"

"Yes, you did—you—er—pelican!"

"What became of the monster?" I asked. "Did it say anything?"

"It spoke. It knocked me down, got to its feet and said, 'Aye am de ship-hoorder,' and then it went on, Pettingill; it went on—with my shirt in its hands. If you ever feel that you have to shoot again—hold lower, old-timer."

Then we went on. Middleton complained about the effects of the shooting, while I suffered untold agonies from cactus spines and the effects of that shotgun.

"We should soon be able to see the mill," said Middleton, peering into the night, "but all I can see is a huddle of low buildings. One is larger than the rest, but none would be suitable for milling."

We walked closer and closer. Finally a canine barked several times, and a man came to the door of the larger house. Middleton and I crouched down behind an old vehicle.

"Some more of those —— coyotes, I reckon," said the man in the door. "They smell the sheep."

And then he shut the door.

"They do not mistrust us," said I, "which simplifies things. No doubt they will be enraged at the coyote in the morning. Do you know what a coyote is, Middleton?"

"No, I do not, and perhaps it is just as well."

Just then we heard the gentle lowing of a sheep. Perhaps it was the call of one to its mate, and we knew we had come to the right place. We crossed to a fence, in side of which we found the sheep.

The gate was locked, but Middleton immediately went to work to break it with a rock. The noise he made seemed to irritate the canine again, causing it to emit staccato barks.

"I fear that the dog will upset our plans, Pettingill," said Middleton as we heard the door open again.

"Not at all," I reassured him. "We will use strategy. A coyote is a young wolf, don't you see? I will dissemble."

I have never made a study of the cries and calls of wild animals, but I did the best I could. Clearing my throat, I began a low-voiced howling, such as one hears in the Zoo at feeding-time.

The dog only barked the louder, and then came voices.

"Coyote ——!" cried one. "That's a banshee with bronchial trouble, Sandy."

I stopped howling, the dog stopped barking, and then we heard:

"I've a hunch, Micky. Give me them shells loaded with number sevens. This ain't no buckshot party."

"Ah! Thank goodness, the barrier is removed!" exclaimed Middleton, and I heard the chain fall.

Middleton gave the gate a shove, and it creaked open.

"Sic 'em, Shep!" cried a voice.

It is likely that the dog misunderstood orders, as I feel sure that its master meant us when he said "sic 'em," but the dog circled us and went through the fence after the sheep.

"Run!" exclaimed Middleton. "They're coming out!"

Middleton was right.

Just at that moment one of those sheep tried to go between my legs. It was a large one—too large, in fact. I grasped it with one hand, quickly, holding

my gun in the other, and attempted to ride it away, but it sprang for a place where all of the fence was missing except for a barbarous wire stretched along the top; and I went backward into the dirt.

I managed to roll over and get to my hands and knees just in time to be struck a murderous blow from the rear, which projected me under the wire and outside the fence. There may have been other openings in that fence, but I will wager that a large per cent, of those sheep came through there and walked over me. After the procession of sharp hoofs had passed me I crawled back and recovered my gun. I had no idea of where Middleton had gone. In fact I don't believe I gave him a thought.

I got to my feet and limped away, feeling rather dazed, as a man might feel after being hard hit, as it were. I toiled up the side of a hill, and suddenly I discerned Middleton. I knew him by the silhouette of his hat against the sky.

"Thank goodness, I have found you!" I exclaimed.

"Same to you," he replied; and it was not Middleton's voice but the voice of the party who suggested the banshee.

I saw the glint of his gun as he turned. I don't know what prompted me to do it, but I leveled my gun and pulled the trigger.

The roar deafened me and the concussion hurled me backward, but I had presence of mind enough to crawl away. Suddenly I fell into a depression, where I lay quiet.

"Hey!" cried a voice. "Was that you, Micky?"

"It was—worse luck to me, Sandy!"

"Was it a shepherd?"

"I won't swear to nothing until I assay meself, but from the feel of me I'd say it was a duck-hunter. Ouch! The divil blazed away at sixty feet, and almost cut the boots off me legs! Bird-shot by the handful!"

"Which way did he go, Micky?"

"How should I know? I always hides me head in a storm of bird-shot."

"Where in thunder did you get that hard hat?"

"Down by the corral. Did you ever know a shepherd to wear a baked bonnet before, Sandy?"

They talked in low tones for a few moments, and then I heard the one called Sandy say:

"Well, they're well scattered, and there's no use hunting in the dark. Next time we'll pack Winchester when them — woollies cross the Mesquite."

"Sure, and I'll wear armor next time I hunt for hard-hatted shepherds in the night time," replied the other, and their voices died away into the night.

I managed to clamber out of the hole, suffering extreme torture all the while. I had not the slightest idea of direction; in fact I seemed to be lost. At any rate I climbed the hill, went down the other side and then climbed another, where I sat down on a rock.

It was very, very quiet up there. Finally a dog came along. I tried to be friendly, but it slunk away at my whistle. Then another one came; and another. I said to myself—

"Pettingill, there must be kennels near here."

From a distant butte, against the pale light of the moon, I saw several more, and then came a wailing howl. From near me came a blood-curdling answer. I said to myself—

"Pettingill, those 'dogs' are wolves!" The realization was painful. I really believe I grew homesick. In all that waste I could not see a tree. I peered around. Ah! On a not too distant ridge stood a tree.

I stood erect, grasped my gun, and hurried up the slope, spurred onward by the howls of at least a million savage throats. Perhaps it was undignified, but I ran; actually ran. Luckily the branches grew low, and I was able, suffering as I was, to climb into the sanctuary of those thick branches. I breathed a sigh of relief, and exclaimed aloud—

"Thank Heaven for this tree!"

And from above me came—

"Pettingill, it is fortunate that you spoke, as I was about to pistol you."

"Middleton!" I gasped. "You here in this tree?"

"Yes. I could find no other. I—I thought perhaps you—that perhaps that sheep had come back; don't you see?"

"Sheep? Sheep do not climb trees, Middleton."

"Well, I am glad to know there is some one thing that it could not do. I would readily believe it could climb, Pettingill."

"How did you happen to pick this tree?" I asked.

"I claim no credit whatever, Pettingill. As the sheep came out of the gate, one of them struck me very, very abruptly. I landed outside the fence, where I tried to conceal myself, but it searched until it found me, and each time I tried to get up it

knocked me down. From there to this tree was just a succession of hard knocks."

"That is really too bad," I replied. "I am physically imperfect myself, Middleton. I think there is nothing more that could hurt me. Have you a comfortable seat up there, Middleton?"

"Wouldn't use it if I had!" he actually grunted at me. "Right at present I am hanging over a bough like a carpet on a line. Pettingill, I may never, never sit down again."

We cheered each other as much as possible through the long night, and were truly grateful when morning came. Looking at Middleton gave me a faint idea of my own appearance. He had neither shirt nor hat, and the upper part of his body was streaked with blood and dirt. His limbs were so stiff he could hardly walk, and mine were little better.

I still retained my hat, although the crown would open and shut in the breeze. We wished for the coats we had left at our camp. Then we walked in what might be the right direction, and suddenly came to a road. Not a well traveled thorough fare, it is true, but at least a roadway. Along this we limped for a while, when we heard the creaking of a wagon behind us.

"Just suppose there should be some ladies aboard," suggested Middleton, and we hastily crouched down beside some bushes.

When the equipage was almost up to us we saw that the team was being driven by a man, and that there were no ladies. We would ask for a ride. We stepped into the road and threw up our hands, signaling him to stop. The driver was smoking his pipe, but as the team halted he opened his mouth, letting the pipe fall to the ground.

Then he sprang to the ground, grasped his hat in his hand, and ran back down the road as fast as possible. His limbs were very badly bowed.

"What a ridiculous thing to do!" exclaimed Middleton. "Abandon his equipage in this manner before we have an opportunity to question him. What will we do, Pettingill?"

"We will drive on. No doubt the team will take us some place. It is reasonable to suppose that a road leads to some thing. I hope we will eventually arrive at some place where a physician resides."

We climbed in, and Middleton took charge of the lines. It was much better than walking, although neither of us could occupy the seat. All went well until we came to a steep hill, where the

horses seemed unable to check the speed of the wagon. I spoke sharply to Middleton about our speed, and he rudely replied:

"Oh, go to ——! If you're going to be a shepherd, be a regular one—dang it!"

I fear that Middleton would soon acquire a profane vocabulary. Somehow we seemed to lose the, road. I spoke to Middleton about it, thinking he did not know, and he shouted in my ear—

"Go get it if you want it—you danged pelican!"

I pondered over his apparent rudeness, and the next instant the team seemed to be taking us straight over a sharp pitch, the wagon swaying sharply as it crashed over rocks and brush. I caught a glimpse of the bottom of another abandoned water-course, and then, with a lurching crash, I was hurled into oblivion.

I dreamed of lying under a splashing fountain, and as I opened my eyes I looked up at Dirty Shirt, who was pouring water into my face from his large hat. I heard Ike's voice say:

"This old pelican ain't dead, Dirty. He just spat out another tooth."

"Say, professor, when did you take a job driving a sheep-wagon?" asked Dirty Shirt.

"Middleton was driving," I whispered. My voice was strangely weak.

"Well—" Dirty Shirt scratched his head and peered across the hills—"well, as a driver he's got more intestines than judgment. He sure is the short-cut kid."

After a while Middleton sat up and essayed a grin. Several of his front teeth were missing, which gave him a leering look. The wagon had smashed to kindling-wood, but they told us that the team escaped serious injury. Dirty Shirt and Ike told us to take it easy while they rounded up the team, which we tried to do.

My gun was in the wreckage, but beyond a deep dent in the barrel it was in very good shape. There were still four cartridges in it, and I managed to manipulate one into the firing-chamber. It is well to be prepared.

Middleton had acquired a pronounced lisp, caused, no doubt, by the missing teeth. Suddenly we saw a man on horse back coming down toward us. Ordinarily I would have paid little heed to him, but we were becoming chary of strangers. I stood up and threw my gun to my shoulder.

"What in —— is the idea?" he asked, halting. "Put down that gun!"

"Thoot him!" lisped Middleton. "Thoot him if he cometh too cloth."

"Have a little sense and put down that gun," said the man.

"Don't let him ditharm your thuthpithions," warned Middleton.

"Go back!" I ordered. "You are in danger."

"——'s delight!" he exclaimed. "There must 'a' been a break in the loco-lodge."

And we watched him ride back to the top of the hill.

"Nithe generalthip," applauded Middleton. "Look—thomebody elthe."

Another rider had joined him, and they both came riding down to us.

"I shall be compelled to fire upon you if you come too close," I warned them.

"Thoot —— out of them if they monkey with uth," said Middleton.

The new one was very tall and grim-looking, with long mustaches and a very large hat. He appeared to uncoil a long rope, and then showed his teeth in a snarling grin.

"Going to shoot that thing, *hombre?*" he asked, and I nodded emphatically.

"You know best," he answered. "Get all set, 'cause I'm coming to get you!"

He spurred his horse forward and side-wise, and just then I fired. I felt that I had wasted the shot, for I pointed where he had been. A terrific force seemed to crash into me, my lungs filled with smoke, and somewhere in my consciousness I seemed to hear a deafening explosion. Then I seemed to feel myself bouncing and sliding over the ground, only to stop with a grinding shock.

A still, small voice within me seemed to say:

"Pettingill, your sands of time are running low. A human being can stand only so much, and you've had your share."

And then I came back to life. I heard voices, far, far away, and some one laughed. The laugh grated upon my nerves; it was as if some one had laughed aloud at a funeral.

"The barrel was dented two-thirds through and bent bad," stated a voice. "Wonder it didn't blow his fool head off instead of kicking —— out of him."

Then I sat up and looked around. I was propped against a rock. Around my chest and over my arms is a tightly pulled rope, and the other end of the rope is fastened to the front end of a saddle

on a horse. Two men are standing near me, examining the remains of my shotgun.

Middleton is sitting near me, his hands and feet roped, and as I looked at him he vulgarly spat out through where a tooth had been, and winked at me. The two turned, and I saw upon the bosom of the taller one the badge of a police officer.

"I didn't think that Olaf had brains enough to go crazy," said the other. "Got to have some brains to start on, I reckon."

"Never can tell," nodded the tall one. "They caught him trying to put dynamite in the stove. He said he was going to blow up the law. Funny thing about it; somebody had filled his pants with bird-shot."

Just then we were interrupted by the coming of Ike and Dirty Shirt, leading the runaway horses. They stared at the strangers.

"Holy henhawks!" exclaimed Dirty. "They've roped our shepherds!"

"Uh-huh," nodded the tall one. "You might say a few words, Dirty."

"Hello, Adams," nodded Dirty to the other one. "Meet Professors Pettingill and Middleton. Gents, this person is Alcohol Adams. The tall one is Magpie Simpkins, the sheriff of Yaller Rock County. He's just as bad as he looks. Magpie, what you got ropes on them pelicans for? They ain't done nothing."

"Well, talk a little, can't you?" asked the Magpie person.

"Well——" Dirty Shirt rolled a smoke—"we tried our dangedest to fulfill our deputization, Magpie. These scientific pelicans pilgrim along, and we take 'em in. *Sabe?* They wants to know from personal experience whether it's sheep or just general wear and tear that puts a shepherd into that mental condition known as crazy.

"They've had a hard time, gents. They sure have herded in the interests of science. We've all had a hard time, Magpie, and I'm off sheep forever. If Scenery Sims and Alphabetical Alien wants them sheep rounded up, they'll have to do it themselves. *Sabe?* Law or no law, we're all done."

"So?"

The sheriff scratched his long nose, and began a silent laugh that shook his gaunt frame.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! You poor, locoed snake-hunters! Listen: I didn't no more than get started for Piperock when I meets Scenery and Alphy. They've done patched up their differences. We

went over to notify you, but you never showed up. I've been looking for you."

"Haw!" replied Dirty Shirt vacantly. "You—uh—Say, who in —— owns the sheep we've been dry-nursing, Magpie?"

"I do," said Mr. Adams. "I had a Swede out here, but he went loco, I reckon, and tried to dynamite Scenery's camp, and ——"

Ike stepped over and took the ropes off Middleton and myself.

"I met the driver of my grub-wagon," said Mr. Adams. "He had been drinking too much lately, I reckon. Said he was held up by twin devils, and that from now on he's through with booze or sheep."

We went down the hill, where Middleton and I recovered our coats. Dirty Shirt and Ike caught our mules and put on the packs. Then they gave us each a rope to lead with.

"The road over there will take you to Silver Bend," explained Ike.

We thanked him heartily, and then shook hands with them all.

"I hope you gents got the information you desired," said Magpie.

"Nothing like personal experience."

"Yeth, we got it," lisped Middleton. "We tholved it."

"I hope you didn't jump at it sudden-like," grinned Magpie.

"No, thir. Not thudden."

"I reckon it's a mistake to say that all shepherds are crazy," observed Magpie. "Cowmen use that expression more because they hate sheep than because the shepherd is loco. They figure that any man is crazy who would herd sheep. *Sabe?*"

"What is your scientific opinion, gents? Do you think they're crazy?"

I looked at Middleton inquiringly, and he nodded.

"I will support you, Pettingill."

"Well," said I, "after personal observation, I will say this much: If he isn't crazy to begin with, and doesn't go crazy—he is a superman."

"Reckon the sheep are to blame?" asked Adams.

"Of courth," lisped Middleton, caressing his back, "the theep are primarily rethponthible, but I'd thay that the greater evil cometh from general wear and tear."

"Which goes to show that personal experience is better than hearsay," agreed Magpie.

"Ordinarily," I agreed, "but from now on I will be more than willing to take unsupported word for things I know nothing about. How about you, Professor Middleton?"

Middleton picked up his rope and spat through his vacant teeth.

"Oh, ——! Leth go, Pettingill. You thaid a mouthful."

WITHOUT RESERVATION

by Stanley Donaldson

A WHISTLE sharp from the darkness, the slack goes out of the train
And we hit her up over the switches, into the drivin' rain.
Clickity-clack and gainin', till the click is a steady pound,
And fainter the lights about us and fainter the fleein' ground
Till there's only a swayin' foot-hold with the square of the tank before,
Black like dread or devil-red as they swing the firebox door.
And so we cling in silence, watchin' the night rush by,
Two of us headed westward, "Curly the Vag" and I.

Money back on the cushions! I close my eyes and feel
Myself a-ridin' with them—the world on an even keel,
The world of the fairy story where the candy mountain's real
With credits that's always credits and a roll that'll never peel.
With Curly sittin' by me, him with a fancy eye,
And a pinch of coke or a four-bit smoke to while the minutes by.
Me in a chair all pretty, or pullin' my shoes for bed,
And never a thought for a minute of a couple of vags ahead.

And I close my eyes to see this and I open them up to see
Only the rain and the darkness leapin' to cut at me,
Or the crawl of the slack or the roarin' of a bridge we leap upon,
Demons out of the darkness racin' to beat the dawn.
So our string sweeps up the tangent or shrieks, at an outer rail
And I cling and doze by Curly and watch the dim stars pale
Till the day blows up their peekin' and shines on another land.
Tickets? There's rust on my shoulder and the smell of iron on my hand!