

HOW I CAME TO WRITE "CATTLE"

By WINNIFRED EATON REEVE (ONOTA WATANNA)

ALTHOUGH my novel "Sunny-san" was the first work by me published after I had come to live in Alberta, I conceived and I wrote "Cattle" as a scenario nearly two years before "Sunny" appeared.

My main character "Bull" Langdon was back in my mind for a long time before I put him on paper. He was there before I had any definite plot, a great brute-man, dominated by his passion for cattle—the human prototype of his own prize bulls.

At this time we were living on our cattle ranch in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. We have a wonderful place there, and we were running several hundred head of cattle. I rode daily. Sometimes riding alone for hours over the hills or into the utterly silent woods, and I would come out into the grazing lands, there were the cattle and the horses; and sometimes I rode with our men and brought in "bunches" of cattle, and I would help at the round-ups.

Then I heard the story of a young English girl, and of the fate that befel her at the hands of a brutal rancher. This story automatically connected itself with my "Bull", though the Bull's character was drawn from no one man I know. He was a composite of several types I had met in both the States and Canada.

One day I made a rough outline of the plot I had in mind. Then I re-wrote it, in detail this time. When I was through I perceived that I had a full synopsis for what I then thought would make a play. Nevertheless I was not sure of my story, and I argued with myself:

"This will never do. No publisher will dare to touch it" and so forth. And, defending: "There's nothing bad in my story. Truth is never bad. Certain elemental facts of life are proper subjects for the story writer

as well as the psychologists. Some of the greatest books would never have been written had their authors not possessed courage and confidence."

"Cattle" was then still in synopsis form, but very detailed. I decided to submit it anonymously to two film companies, The Famous Players and the D. W. Griffith Company. I aimed high from the first.

Meanwhile Mr. Murray Gibbon and Arthur Stringer visited me at our ranch at Morley, and I told them something of my story. Arthur Stringer advised me not to try to "come back" with a Canadian story. He said: "Don't leave your Japanese tales too suddenly. When you are reestablished, then try a Canadian novel."

(I Had Not Written for Over Five Years)

So, while "Cattle" was out at the film companies, I followed Arthur Stringer's advice. I went to town, shut myself up in a room and in five weeks I wrote my "Sunny-san". I worked especially hard and absorbedly, because just prior to this I had a reply from the Famous Players. They wrote a long letter. They said: "You have a very real and gripping narrative, with strength and screen drama"; but they also declared that my situation of the betrayed heroine was impossible for the screen.

I said: "That's that," rolled my manuscript up and chucked it into a drawer. I had had no reply from Griffith.

I had been back at the ranch about three months when one day I rode over after the mail to Morley, an Indian trading post, seven miles from our ranch. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I read that first letter from the D. W. Griffith Company,

Inc. It was signed by Harry Carr, scenario editor, and he wrote that he considered my "Cattle" the "very best script that has come into this office in many and many a day."

You may be sure that after reading that letter I rode home literally on air. There followed a lengthy correspondence between Mr. Carr and myself. He wrote me that "all of us here hope that Mr. Griffith will see his way to doing "Cattle" and that he believed it would prove "a world tipper of the cattle country." Also that he personally believed I would "blaze the trail for a new type of western story" and so forth and so on.

Despite the fact that Mr. Griffith gave me no personal verdict, Mr. Carr's judgment buoyed me up. Soon after this "Sunny-san" was published, sold as a book, for the stage and for motion pictures, and I went on to New York for a business trip. In New York Elizabeth Marbury, who had read my "Cattle" and three other scenarios of Canada, I had also written, said to me: "Go to it. Your Canadian stuff is away ahead of anything you have done in Japanese stories."

Back I came to Alberta, and I leaped at the work of writing "Cattle" as a novel. It literally poured out of me. I could not set the words down swiftly enough.

The manuscript had an eccentric career in publishers' offices. It acted like a bomb in one or two places. One New York publisher wrote me that it had caused more heated discussion and argument than any manuscript that had been in their office for years. Certain of the staff were for it. The sales end were against it. Another wrote me a mournful and fatherly letter. (He was an old friend). He deplored the subject I had chosen: he thought that my life in Alberta was ruining me in a literary way and he said that "Cattle" was a man's subject. Another man urged me to choose a more popular theme for a first novel of Canada, and follow it with "Cattle". One publisher wrote: "It is one of the most brutal stories I have ever read. I could not put it

WHY DON'T

(A new and revised edition of Mr. Stead's poems has just been published under the title, "The Empire Builders". One of the most powerful war poems of this volume is the lyric, "Why Don't They Cheer?")

"Why don't they cheer?" the stranger said,

"Why don't they cheer when the troops go out?"

He thought our hearts were cold or dead

Because we raised no song nor shout.

But we had known them in the past

down till I had finished it. It gripped me; but its sheer brutality is awful, and renders the book impossible for publication."

I had two tentative acceptances—that is, they would publish my book on certain conditions, a total revision, in one case and in another the tie-up of several of my future books.

I followed at least the advice of one of the firms. I wrote a "cheerful" story of the ranching country, and while "Cattle" was being considered by the publishers of New York, I wrote "Cheerio". I named it "Among those Missing," but the motion picture manager, who acquired the rights to it changed the title (with my consent) to "Cheerio."

Meanwhile "Cattle" was well received in England where it was immediately accepted by the English house of Hutchinson and Company, and soon after I made a contract with the Canadian firm of Hodder and Stoughton. Followed a contract with the W. J. Watt and Company of New York City, and will make it their first publication for 1924. "Cattle" was at last disposed of.