

Classic Poetry Series

Henry Herbert Knibbs
- poems -

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Henry Herbert Knibbs(24 October 1874 - 17 May 1945)

Henry Herbert Knibbs was born to American parents on October 24, 1874, in Clifton, Ontario (later known as Niagara Falls). He became fascinated by the fiddle and learned to play at an early age. He suffered from a respiratory ailment for most of his life. Knibbs never worked as a cowboy, but he wrote western short stories, novels and poems. His father, George Knibbs, was a bank clerk at Pierce, Howard and Co., Bankers in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Eventually the company failed, casting the family into hard times. Knibbs spent summer vacations at his grandparents' farm in Pennsylvania. On the farm, he developed a love of horses nearly as great as that for his fiddle. Though he never earned a college degree, Knibbs attended Woodstock College and Bishop Ridley College in Ontario and studied English at Harvard. Leaving college, he spent two years hoboing in the American Midwest. In 1899, he married Ida Julia Pfeifer and went to work for the railroad in Buffalo, N.Y. In 1910, he moved to California and wrote his first Western novel, *Lost Farm Camp*. He then left on a long trip through New Mexico, Arizona and California to soak up local color for his writing. In 1929, Knibbs left his wife to live with Turbesé Lummis Fiske. Ida refused to grant him a divorce and wrote him daily begging him to return home. Turbesé, whose father, Charles Lummis, was a Western writer, influenced and edited much of his later work. Knibbs wrote 13 novels and six books of poems. His novels are out of print and largely forgotten, but his poetry remains popular in cowboy poet circles. Among his best remembered poems are *Boomer Johnson* and *When the Ponies Come to Drink*. Seven films made between 1919 and 1930 were based on his stories and novels. Knibbs career as a Western write came to a sudden halt when he mistakenly gave the period of a mare's gestation as nine months in a story published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He was crucified by his peers for the mistake. He certainly knew that the correct period was 11 months, but this slip of the pen cost him his writing career, as he was never able to get another piece published. He died in San Diego, California, on May 17, 1945, from respiratory illness.

Boomer Johnson

Now Mr. Boomer Johnson was a gettin' old in spots,
But you don't expect a bad man to go wrastlin' pans and pots;
But he'd done his share of killin' and his draw was gettin' slow,
So he quits a-punchin' cattle and he takes to punchin' dough.

Our foreman up and hires him, figurin' age had rode him tame,
But a snake don't get no sweeter just by changin' of its name.
Well, Old Boomer knowed his business - he could cook to make you smile,
But say, he wrangled fodder in a most peculiar style.

He never used no matches - left em layin' on the shelf,
Just some kerosene and cussin' and the kindlin' lit itself.
And, pardner, I'm allowin' it would give a man a jolt
To see him stir frijoles with the barrel of his Colt.

Now killin' folks and cookin' ain't so awful far apart,
That musta been why Boomer kept a-practicin' his art;
With the front sight of his pistol he would cut a pie-lid slick,
And he'd crimp her with the muzzle for to make the edges stick.

He built his doughnuts solid, and it sure would curl your hair
To see him plug a doughnut as he tossed it in the air.
He bored the holes plum center every time his pistol spoke,
Till the can was full of doughnuts and the shack was full of smoke.

We-all was gettin' jumpy, but he couldn't understand
Why his shootin' made us nervous when his cookin' was so grand.
He kept right on performin', and it weren't no big surprise
When he took to markin' tombstones on the covers of his pies.

They didn't taste no better and they didn't taste no worse,
But a-settin' at the table was like ridin' in a hearse;
You didn't do no talkin' and you took just what you got,
So we et till we was foundered just to keep from gettin' shot.

When at breakfast one bright mornin', I was feelin' kind of low,
Old Boomer passed the doughnuts and I tells him plenty:
'No, All I takes this trip is coffee, for my stomach is a wreck.'
I could see the itch for killin' swell the wattle on his neck.

Scorn his grub? He strings some doughnuts on the muzzle of his gun,
And he shoves her in my gizzard and he says, 'You're takin' one!'
He was set to start a graveyard, but for once he was mistook;
Me not wantin' any doughnuts, I just up and salts the cook.

Did they fire him? Listen, pardner, there was nothin' left to fire,
Just a row of smilin' faces and another cook to hire.
If he joined some other outfit and is cookin', what I mean,
It's where they ain't no matches and they don't need kerosene.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Bread

Oh, my heart it is just achin'
For a little bit of bacon
A hunk of bread, a little mug of brew
I'm tired of seein' scenery
Just lead me to a beanery
Where there's something more than only air to chew

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Bronco Shod With Wings

Sing me a home beyond the stars, and if the song be fair,
I'll dwell awhile with melody--as long as mortal dare.
But sing me to the earth again on wide, descending wings,
That I may not forget the touch of homely human things.

Nor let my heart forget a friend, or turn from daily toil,
Though scant the measured recompense, the mean, the wine, the oil;
Nor scorn the rugged way I came with hunger pressing hard,
Before I knew the narrow gate or feared the breaking-yard.

The ragged coat, the grinning shoe, the glance bereft of pride,
And would I dare, who trod the mire, to thrust their plaint aside?
My dog's affection chides my soul for that I may not be
One half the loyal gentleman his eyes have mirrored me.

The homely things, the human things, the things begat of earth,
And least among them he who scorns the clay that gave him birth:
My horse that nickers in the field and points his slender ears,
Has taught me more of gratitude than all the singing years.

What friend the trees, the soil, the stone, the turning grain, the flower!
House timber, garden, portal-step, bread, fruit, and fragrant hour
When shred, the leaf is touched by fire, draws cool and clear and clean,
And smoky spirals sing the praise of soothing nicotine!

The intimate companionship of saddle, spur, and gun,
The joy of leather, smooth and strong, of silver in the sun,
The grip of trout-rod to the hand, the play of jeweled reel,
The stock that fits the shoulder-curve--the potency of steel.

Forgetting not the rope and hitch, the steaming pack-horse train,
The sliding shale, the ragged pitch, the thunder and the rain,
The smell of coffee in the dawn that gilds the far divide;
Sing me a home beyond the start--but give me trails to ride.

And so my friend, because, my friend, our ways lie far apart,
And I may never grip your hand, yet I may reach your heart:
I'll drop the reins and slip the cinch, untie the saddle-strings,
And carve a picture on the rock--a bronco shod with wings.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Do You Remember?

My pony knickers at the corral bars,
The fog drifts landward from the evening sea:
The trail we rode is dim beneath the stars...
Do you remember, friend who rode with me?
Shadowy range and range, and at each bend,
A pit of black as fathomless as the space
A trail with not beginning and no end,
Where even Silence hid her listening face?
Beyond each step there spread the deep Unknown;
Below, the mountain stream sang ceaselessly:
We rode together -- yet each rode alone --
Do you remember, friend who rode with me?
Down from the height to valley deep and still,
Where no star shone within the forest gloom;
Where sense of place was lost, and Time stood still,
The shuttle trembling midway in the loom.
Only our patient ponies knew the way,
Plodding with slow assurance through the night:
Would we could read as clearly in the day,
Each step beyond, in valley or on height.
Forgive the preachment -- I had lost the trail.
To eulogize the horses is my theme,
To sing the blue wherein the eagles sail,
To chant of mountains and the cañon-stream:
The glory of the sunset and the dawn,
The wind that drew a lyric from the pines,
And made us wish the clothing we had on
Were not so thin, and shaped on different lines.
The trail brings hardship, toil, and goodly sweat:
As Homespun says: 'Thereon you flirt with Death':
It knocks one floating ribs ashore--and yet,
It lengthens friendship, though it shortens breath.
Beyond each step there spread the deep Unknown;
Below a hidden stream sang ceaselessly:
We rode together -- yet each rode alone,
Do you remember, friend who rode with me?

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Drink Deep

Never twice in the world you find,
A lad whose heart is the gold you spend,
And his free hand of your heart, in kind,
When the joy of each is to give, not lend:
Yes one shall tarry and one shall sleep,
So while you stand in the sun, drink deep.
Soon, too soon shall the sunlight pass,
And one shall mourn in the starless night,
As he snaps the stem of an empty glass,
That brimmed of old with a brave delight:
And one of you twain must the vigil keep,
So while you stand in the sun, drink deep.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Largo

Bought him of the Navajos—shadow of a pony,
Over near the Largo draw, runnin' up and down;
Twenty pesos turned the trick—broke me cold and stony;
Then I set to figure as I rambled into town.

'Fore I had the feel of him, twice he like to throwed me;
He did n't have to figure sums 'cause he was n't broke;
Then he took to runnin' and unknowin'-like, he showed me
Speed that was surprisin' in a twenty-dollar joke.

Wiry little Navajo, no bigger than a minute;
Did a heap of restin' up when he got the chance,
But...ever stop a pin-wheel just to locate what was in it,
Findin' unexpected you was settin' on your pants?

That was him—the Largo hoss; did n't take to schoolin';
Relayed out of Calient' into Santa Fé;
Fifty mile of kickin' sand and not a wink of foolin'
When he hit the desert trail windin' down that way.

Once they put a blooded hoss on the trail behind him;
Passed me like a Kansas blow; Largo did n't mind,
Kept a-runnin' strong and sweet. Reckoned that we'd find him
Like we did, in twenty mile, busted, broke, and blind.

Ever see a Injun race? Times I could 'a' sold him
For a dozen cattle—a most interestin' price;
Set to figurin' ag'in—bought the mare that foaled him:
Shucks! Her colts they could n't beat a herd of hobbled mice.

Took the brush and curry-comb—thought he'd understand it ...
Him a-loafin' lazy with his nose across the bars;
Reckon dudes comes natural; as hard as he could land it,
He druv home his opinion while I gathered up the stars.

That was him—the Largo hoss; never saw another
Desert hoss could beat him when he started out to float.
Pedigree? He had n't none; a pony was his mother,
And judgin' from his looks I guess his father was a goat.

That's him now a-standin' there, sleepy-like and dreamin';
 Sell him? Thought you'd ask me that. Northern mail is late
Just three hours. No, not to-day, pardner. Without seemin'
 Brash—from here to Santa Fé we'll wipe it off the slate.

Bought him of the Navajos—broke me cold and stony;
 But I got a roll to-day—tell you what I'll do—
Ridin' south? Well, pardner, I'll just give you that there pony,
 If we ain't in Santa Fé three hours ahead of you.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Little Bronc

Little Bronc, I'm goin' to ride you—you a-hidin' in between
Blue and Baldy! Think you're bluffin'
With your snortin' and your puffin';
Quit! and save yourself a roughin',
Guess you sabe what I mean.

Yes, my loop is wide and trailin'—and your eye a-showin' white: Reckon that I
got to show you, For I broke you and I know you, Mebby-so I got to throw
you 'Fore I get them cinches tight. 'T ain't no use! I got you comin' and I aim to
take a chance: Pitch and squeal and fight ag'in it! I'll be with you, in a
minute; Hell to breakfast

—all that's in it, I'm your pardner for this dance! Grunt you! Forty pounds of
saddl

—and you swellin' like a cow: I was raised down on the Tonto, Where they
break and ride 'em pronto: You're fork-lightnin' to git onto, But I aim to fork
you, now. Whee! Now just unwind your feelin's! Get them wrinkles from your
hide! Here's the iron for your balkin', Just stiff-mad because I'm talkin',
And you aim to set me walkin', Well, you bronc

—I aim to ride! Steady! Thought you knowed the iron! Guess your pitchin' fit is
done. Now dig in and scatter dirt, you! Shakin' 'cause you think I'll quirt
you? Shucks, I never aimed to hurt you, I'm just playin' with you, son! See
that spot of green down yonder? That's the town of San José. Thirty mile we
come a-sweatin', Tail a-switchin', ears a-frettin', But your boss is still a-
settin' In the hull, and goin' to stay. Howdy John! What, sell this pony? Say,
you're talkin' through your hat; This here bronc is wise to ropin', Thirty
miles we come, a-lopin', Gentle? Sure! And

—well, here's hopin' Yes, I'll take a hundred, flat. Sold that pitchin' chunk of
trouble, and there ain't no use to stay. Air'll be thick here, after dinner,
When John forks that outlaw sinner: And I'm goin' where it's thinner: Yes, I'm
leavin' San José.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Make Me No Grave

Make me no grave within that quiet place
Where friends shall sadly view the grassy mound,
Politely solemn for a little space,
As though the spirit slept beneath the ground.

For me no sorrow, nor the hopeless tear;
No chant, no prayer, no tender eulogy:
I may be laughing with the gods--while here
You weep alone. Then make no grave for me

But lay me where the pines, austere and tall,
Sing in the wind that sweeps across the West:
Where night, imperious, sets her coronal
Of silver stars upon the mountain crest.

Where dawn, rejoicing, rises from the deep,
And Life, rejoicing, rises with the dawn:
Mark not the spot upon the sunny steep,
For with the morning light I shall be gone.

Far trails await me; valleys vast and still,
Vistas undreamed of, canyon-guarded streams,
Lowland and range, fair meadow, flower-girt hill,
Forests enchanted, filled with magic dreams.

And I shall find brave comrades on the way:
None shall be lonely in adventuring,
For each a chosen task to round the day,
New glories to amaze, new songs to sing.

Loud swells the wind along the mountain-side,
High burns the sun, unfettered swings the sea,
Clear gleam the trails whereon the vanished ride,
Life calls to life: then make no grave for me!

Henry Herbert Knibbs

On The Range

My pony was standin' thinkin' deep;
Can hosses think? Well, I reckon so!
And I was squattin', half asleep,
When into the firelight stepped a Bo.

He grinned in a kind of friendly way;
He ate some grub and he rolled a smoke.
I sort of listened for him to say
What was comin'—and this is how he spoke:

'Oh, the world is good and her towns are good,
And so are her folks, if understood.
Hay-foot, straw-foot, left and right,
Over the next hill, out of sight,
Rambling everywhere, day and night,
And plenty of things to see;

'For the world is good and her folks are good,
And all of 'em like to be understood,
From the rich man ridin' his limousine
To the guy that is hit by the big machine,
And the thousand or so that are in between,
Clear down to a Bo, like me.

'All you have to do is cast your eye
On the sun or the stars, without askin' why,
Or the moon there, rollin' above the line;
She don't crowd the stars but she lets 'em shine:
And pal, don't you think they are doin' fine,
All helpin' to make the show?

'An we all got passes to go and see
All there is—and all there is goin' to be.
Hay-foot and straw-foot, left and right,
And I'm usin' my pass both day and night,
And she's good for the whole show. Get me right?
And I'm nothin' except a Bo;

'Yes, the coarsest siftin' of the lot.

Now imagine the chance that best has got.
Sure there ain't no medals stuck on my vest,
But I would n't change with the gilt-edged best,
And when it come time to lie down and rest,
Well I guess it will come right good;

'But somehow, or somehow to me, it seems
That that pass is good where they make the dreams.
Say, maybe we'll see it all over again,
The wind and the sun and the snow and the rain,
And old friends and places, and see 'em plain,
And all of 'em understood.

I was punchin' then for the old Tejon.
I reckon I won't forget that night,
Or the Bo and me by the fire alone,
With nothin' but sand and sage in sight.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Punchin' Dough

Come, all you young waddies, I'll sing you a song,
Stand back from the wagon--stay where you belong:
I've heard you observin' I'm fussy and slow
While you're punchin' cattle and I'm punchin' dough.

Now I reckon your stomach would grow to your back
If it wa'n't for the cook that keeps fillin' the slack:
With the beans in the box and pork in the tub,
I'm a-wonderin' now, who would fill you with grub?

You think you're right handy with gun and with rope,
But I've noticed you're bashful when usin' the soap:
When you're rollin' your Bull for your brown cigarette
I' been rollin' the dough for them biscuits you et.

When you're cuttin' stock, then I'm cuttin' a steak:
When you're wranglin' hosses, I'm wranglin' a cake:
When you're hazin' the dogies, and battin' your eyes,
I'm hazin' dried apples that aim to be pies.

You brag about shootin' up windows and lights,
But try shootin' biscuits for twelve appetites:
When you crawl from your roll and the ground it is froze
Then who biles the coffee that thaws out your nose?

In the old days the punchers just took what they got:
It was sow-belly, beans, and the old coffee-pot;
But now you come howlin' for pie and for cake,
Then cuss at the cook for a good bellyache.

You say that I'm old, with my feet on the skids
Well, I'm tellin' you now that you're nothin' but kids:
If you reckon your mounts are some snaky and raw,
Just try ridin' herd on a stove that won't draw.

When you look at my apron, you're readin' my brand,
Four-X, which is the sign for the best in the land:
On bottle or sack it sure stands for good luck,
So line up, you waddies, and wrangle your chuck.

No use of your snortin' and fightin' your head;
If you like it with chilli, just eat what I said:
For I aim to be boss of this end of the show
While you're punchin' cattle, and I'm punchin' dough.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Riders Of The Stars

Twenty abreast down the golden street, ten thousand riders marched;
Bow-legged boys in their swinging chaps, all clumsily keeping time;
And the Angel Host to the lone, last ghost their delicate eyebrows arched
As the swaggering sons of the open range drew up to the Throne Sublime.

Gaunt and grizzled a Texas man from out of the concourse strode,
And doffed his hat with a rude, rough grace, then lifted his eagle head;
The sunlit air on his silvered hair and the bronze of his visage glowed;
'Marster, the boys have a talk to make on the things up here,' he said.

A hush ran over the waiting throng as the Cherubim replied:
'He that readeth the hearts of men He deemeth your challenge strange,
Though He long hath known that ye crave your own, that ye would not walk but
ride,
Oh, restless sons of the ancient earth, ye men of the open range!'

Then warily spake the Texas man: 'A petition, and no complaint.
We here present, if the Law allows and the Marster He thinks it fit;
We-all agree to the things that be, but we're longing for things that ain't,
So we took a vote and we made a plan, and here is the plan we writ:--

"Give us a range and our horses and ropes; open the Pearly Gate,
And turn us loose in the unfenced blue riding the sunset rounds,
Hunting each stray in the Milky Way and running the Rancho straight;
Not crowding them dogie stars too much on their way to their bedding-grounds.

"Maverick comets that's running wild, we'll rope 'em and brand 'em fair,
So they'll quit stampeding the starry herd and scaring the folks below,
And we'll save 'em prime for the round-up time and we riders 'll all be there,
Ready and willing to do our work as we did in the long ago.

"We've studied Ancient Landmarks, Sir; Taurus, the Bear, and Mars,
And Venus a-smiling across the west as bright as a burning coal,
Plain to guide as we punchers ride night-herding the little stars,
With Saturn's rings for our home corral and the Dipper our water-hole.

"Here, we have nothing to do but yarn of the days that have long gone by.
And our singing it does n't fit in up here, though we tried it for old-time's sake;
Our hands are itching to swing a rope and our legs are stiff; that's why

We ask you, Marster, to turn us loose--just give us an even break!"

Then the Lord He spake to the Cherubim, and this was His kindly word:
'He that keepeth the threefold keys shall open and let them go;
Turn these men to their work again to ride with the starry herd;
My glory sings in the toil they crave; 't is their right. I would have it so.'

Have you heard in the starlit dusk of eve when the lone coyotes roam,
The Yip! Yip! Yip! of a hunting-cry, and the echo that shrilled afar,
As you listened still on a desert hill and gazed at the twinkling dome,
And a viewless rider swept the sky on the trail of a shooting star?

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Right Of Way

'Save your hoss for the hills ahead,' is the cowboy's placid song.
While his clear eyes follow the twinkling train as the Titan speeds along;
He grins as the tail lights die in space and a cloudless moon appears,
His free heart tuned to his pony's pace, he sings to the shuffling steers.
And, 'He's bustin' right into To-morrow, bronc; just splittin' the night in two;
I reckon he's got the right of way, but that's nothin' to me and you;
Oh, he'll make his time and we'll take our time with plenty of room to roam,
So it's save your hoss for the hills ahead and mebbly you'll make it home.'
And these are the singers the outlands know, each with his work in hand,
In the lurching cab of the Desert Mail; in saddle and grazing land;
One who sings to the midnight herd, breathing his simple creed,
And one who hurtles through cloven space singing the song of speed.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Roll A Rock Down

On, out in the West where the riders are ready,
They sing an old song and they tell an old tale,
And its moral is plain: Take it easy, go steady,
While riding a horse on the Malibu Trail.

It's a high, rocky trail with its switch-backs and doubles,
It has no beginning and never an end:
It's risky and rough and it's plumb full of troubles,
From Shifty -- that's shale -- up to Powder Cut Bend.

Old-timers will tell you the rangers who made it,
Sang 'Roll A Rock Down,' with a stiff upper lip,
And cussed all creation, but managed to grade it;
With a thousand-foot drop if a pony should slip.

Oh, the day it was wet and the sky it was cloudy,
The trail was as slick as any oil-riggers's pants
When Ranger McCabe on his pony, Old Rowdy,
Came ridin' where walkin' was takin' a chance.

'Oh, Roll A Rock Down!' picks and shovels was clangin',
And Rowdy a-steppin' that careful and light,
When the edge it gave way and McCabe was left hangin'
Clean over the rim--with no bottom in sight.

I shook out a loop--bein' crowded for throwin';
I flipped a fair noose for a rope that was wet:
It caught just as Mac lost his holt and was goin',
And burned through my fingers: it's burnin' them yet.

For Ranger McCabe never knuckled to danger;
My pardner in camp, on the trail, or in town:
And he slid into glory, a true forest ranger,
With' 'Hell! I'm a-goin'! Just roll a rock down.'

So, roll a rock down where a ranger is sleepin'
Aside of his horse below Powder Cut Bend:
I ride and I look where the shadows are creepin',
And roll a rock down--for McCabe was my friend.

I've sung you a song and I've told you my story,
And all that I ask when I'm done with the show,
Is, roll a rock down when I slide into glory,
And say that I went like a ranger should go.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

So Long, Chinook!

Chinook, you're free: there's plenty pasture there:
Your gallant years have earned you more ... and
yet ..

Go on and graze! Don't stand like that and stare!
Now quit your nosing! No, I'll not forget.

You want some sugar? Lady's horse you are!
I reckon I've spoiled you. Some would say,
'A pet, that lazies by the corral bar,
Rubbing his mane and switching flies all day.

Chinook, they did n't know you as a colt:
We were some young and wild in those days, Chinook!
They never tamed a foot-loose thunderbolt
That pawed a star down, every jump he took.

Here now--my pocket's empty! Drift along.
Your saddle's off. Now can't you understand
We've made the last ride, sung the last old song?
They signed our warrant when they fenced this land.

Doggone it! This is not a funeral.
I've turned you loose for good, old horse; you're free.
Why don't you kick and squeal and act like--well,
Perhaps you feel it's tough to quit -- like me.

Say, if you will keep nosing me, why, there!
Listen! Do you remember how she came
Laughing--a rosebud pretty in her hair,
And I reached down? And how you played the game?

You, fire and trouble! that day you stood still
For once: and I was lucky. And that night
I turned you loose to graze on Flores hill:
The yucca never bloomed so tall and white!

Young days, young ways, and many trails to ride,
And Romance tugging at the bridle-rein:
Chinook, and if we swung a bit aside,

We always found the old home trail again.

And here we are! I reckon we're both free:
No wonder that you stand like that and look
So solemn and wise. What's wrong with me?
I'm talking wild, to-day, So long, Chinook!

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Song Of The Gray Stallion

My dam was a mustang white and proud,
My sire was as black as a thunder cloud;
I was foaled on the mesas cold and high,
Where the strong ones live and the weak ones die,
And the mountain-lion steals;
Hid in the brush I knew no fear,
With a milk-white mustang grazing near;
When the grass grew green in the summer sun,
I learned to dodge and I learned to run,
And I learned to use my heels.
Sleek and strong and a stallion grown,
I took no place that was not my own;
I fought for life in the winter storm,
And I fought for pride when the sun grew warm,
And the mares ran, calling shrill;
Then hot with pride of my young desire,
I drove from the band my fighting sire;
My flanks dripped red but my crest was high,
For the young must live and the old must die,
Over hollow land and hill;
So if you think to down my pride,
Build a swift loop, cowboy, build it wide,
For I'm hard to catch and hard to tame,
I bear no brand, but I've earned my name,
The wild horse, stallion gray.
The mesa wind blows high and free,
But no wind that blows can outrun me;
You can sink your rowels out of sight,
And quirt your horse till his eye rolls white,
But I'll be far away.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Sunlight

Sunlight, a colt from the ranges, glossy and gentle and strong,
Dazed by the multiple thunder of wheels and the thrust of the sea,
Fretted and chafed at the changes—ah, but the journey was long!
Officer's charger—a wonder—pick of the stables was he.

Flutter of flags in the harbor; rumble of guns in the street;
England! and rhythm of marching; mist and the swing of the tide;
France and an Oriflamme arbor of lilies that drooped in the heat;
Sunlight, with mighty neck arching, flecked with the foam of his pride!

Out from the trenches retreating, weary and grimy and worn,
Lean little men paused to cheer him, turning to pass to their rest;
Shrilled him a pitiful greeting, mocking the promise of morn
With hope and wild laughter to hear him answer with challenging zest.

Victory! That was the spirit! Once they had answered the thrill;
Toiled at the guns while incessant sang that invisible, dread
Burden of death. Ah, to hear it, merciless, animate, shrill,
Whining aloft in a crescent, shattering living and dead!

And Sunlight? What knew he of battle? Strange was this turmoil and haste.
Why should he flinch at the firing; swerve at the mangled and slain?
Where was the range and the cattle? Here was but carnage and waste;
Yet with a patience untiring he answered to spur and to rein.

Answered, when, out of disorder, rout, and the chaos of night,
Came the command to his master, 'Cover the Seventh's retreat!'
On, toward the flame of the border, into the brunt of the fight,
Swept that wild wind of disaster, on with the tide of defeat.

Softly the dawn-wind awaking fluttered a pennant that fell
Over the semblance of Sunlight, stark in the pitiless day;
Riddled and slashed by the bullets sped from the pit of that hell . . .
Groaning, his master, beside him, patted his neck where he lay.

'Sunlight, it was n't for glory . . . England . . . or France . . . or the fame
Of victory . . . No . . . not the glowing tribute of history's pen.
Good-bye, old chap, for I'm going . . . earned it . . . your death is a shame . . .
We fought for the world, not an Island . . . We fought for the honor of men.'

.....

So we have sold them our horses. What shall we do with the gold?
Lay it on Charity's altar, purchasing columns of praise?
Noble indeed are our courses; running the race as of old;
But why should we Mammonites falter? Noble indeed are our ways.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Bronco

The bronco's mighty wild and tough,
And full of outdoor feelin's:
His feet are quick, his ways are rough,
He's careless in his dealin's.

Each mornin' he must have his spree,
And hand you plenty trouble
A-pitchin' round the scenery
Till you are seein' double.

Or mebby-so, you think he's broke,
And do a little braggin';
'Plumb gentle hoss!' he sees the joke,
And leaves--with reins a-draggin'.

Or, mebby-so, you think he'll jump
That little three-foot railin':
When all he does is stop and hump,
And stay--while you go sailin'.

But when his pitchin' fit is done,
And ropin', cuttin', brandin',
Is on the bill--I'll tell you son,
He works with understandin'.

At workin' stock he's got his pride:
--Dust rollin', boys a-yellin'--
He'll turn your steer, and make you ride,
And he don't need no tellin'.

Perhaps you're standin' middle-guard,
Or ridin' slow, night-hawkin':
And then your bronc is sure your pard,
At loafin', or at walkin'.

Or, when the lightnin' flashes raw,
And starts the herd a-flyin',
He's off to head 'em down the draw,
Or break your neck, a-tryin'.

A bronc he sure will take his part,
At gettin' there or stayin':
He'll work until he breaks his heart,
Be he don't sabe playin'.

He may be wild, he may be tough,
And full of outdoor feelin's:
But he's all leather, sure enough,
And he puts through his dealin's.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Dog Star Pup

On the silver edge of a vacant star near the trembling Pleiades,
A Hobo, lately arrived from earth sat rubbing his rusty chin,
All unaware, as he waited there with his elbows on his knees,
That an angel stood at the Golden Gate, impatient to let him in.

The Hobo, peering across the space on a million worlds below,
Started up as he heard a voice: 'Mortal, why ye wait there?'
He scratched his head as he turned and said, 'I reckon I got to go,
And mebbly the goin' is just as good in Heaven, as anywhere.

A little while and the Hobo stood at the thrice-barred Golden Gate:
'Enter!' the stately angel cried. 'You came to a worthy end,
Though the sad arrears of your wasted years have occasioned a brisk debate,
You gave your life in a noble cause--you perished to save a friend.'

'Only me dog.' And the Hobo smiled, but the startled angel frowned
At that rack of rags that was standing there adorning the right-of-way:
'Him and me we was pardners, see! down there where the world goes round,
And I was waitin' for him to come--but mebbly he stopped to play.'

'You are late,' said the angel, 'one year late!' The Hobo turned his head.
'Then who was holdin' the watch on me when I saved me pal? Was you?
Just figure it out, if me dog cashed in a-savin' me life, instead,
Now would n't he wait for his missin' mate till he seen I was comin' too?'

Sadly the angel shook his head and lifted the portal bar:
'One minute more and the Scribe will strike your name from the Roll Sublime.'
When up from below came a yellow dog a-hopping from star to star,
And wagging his tail as he sniffed the trail that his master had to climb.

Then something slipped in the scheme of things: a comet came frisking by,
A kind of a loco Dog-star pup just out for a little chase;
The yellow pup got his dander up and started across the sky,
As the flickering comet tucked his tail--and never was such a race!

Round the Heavens and back again flew comet and his dog, unchecked;
The Great Bear growled and the Sun Dogs barked. Astronomers had begun
To rub their eyes in a wild surmise that their records were incorrect,
When the puppy, crossing his master's trace, stopped short, and the race was

done.

Singed and sorry and out of breath he mounted the starry trail,
And trotted to where his master stood by the gate to the Promised Land:
'T was a flamin' run that you gave him, son, and you made him tuck his tail,'
And the Hobo patted the puppy's head with a soiled but forgiving hand.

When, slowly the Gates dissolved in air and the twain were left along,
On a road that would through fields and flowers, past many a shady tree;
'Now this is like we'd 'a' made it, tike, an' I reckon it's all our own,
And nothin' to do but go,' he said, 'which is Heaven for you and for me.'

Heaven -- save that the Hobo felt a kind of uneasy pride
As he pushed his halo a bit aslant and gazed at his garments strange;
But the pup knew naught of these changes wrought since crossing the Great
Divide,
For the heart of a dog -- and the love of a man -- may never forget or change.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Edge Of Town

The scattering sage stands thin and tense
As though afraid of the barbed-wire fence;
A windmill purrs in the lazy breeze
And a mocker sings in the pepper trees,
And beneath their shadows, gold and blue,
Hangs the old red olla, rimmed with dew:
Where the valley quail in the twilight call,
As the sunset fades on the 'dobe wall,
Just where the foothill trail comes down,
I have made my home on the edge of town.

A few green acres fenced and neat,
By a road that will never become a street;
And once in a while, down the dusty way
A traveler comes at the end of the day;
A desert rat or some outland tramp,
Seeking a place of his evening camp;
The door of my 'dobe is four feet wide,
And there's always a bed and a meal, inside.

And many a one of the wights that roam,
Has stopped at my house and found a home:
And many a tale of these outland folk
Has furnished a tang to the evening smoke,
While the stars shone down on our dwelling-place,
And the moon peered in at a dusky face.

Singers, they, of the open land;
The timbered peak and the desert sand,
Peril and joy of the hardy quest,
Trail and pack of the unspoiled West:
Though crowded back to the lone, last range,
Their dream survives that will never change.

When the hill-stream roars from the far-off height,
And the rain on the patio dances white;
And the log in my winter fireplace gleams,
And my Airedale whimpers his hunting-dreams;
Should a boot-heel grate on the portal floor,

Should I hear a knock at the dripping door,
Then I know that Romance has again come down
From the high, far hills, to the edge of town.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Lone Red Rock

A song of the range, an old-time song,
To the patter of pony's feet,
That he used to sing as we rode along,
In the hush of the noonday heat;
'Follow me out where the cattle graze,
Where the morning shadows fall,
On the far, dim trails of outland ways
That lead through the chaparral.'
There, where the red butte stands alone,
And the brush dies down to sand,
Is the name of a friend--a mound of stone,
And the sweep of this lonesome land.
His name is there, and a word or two,
And the brand that we used to run;
But his name could never mean much to you,
And the old, glad days are done.
'Follow me out where the free sons ride,
Where the young coyotes play;
Where the call of the quail from the mountain-side
Comes out of the morning gray.'
'Follow me out' -- a laugh, a word,
In the dust of the roundup, when
His horse went down in the milling herd,
A break in the haze--and then;
I dragged him free, and he tried to smile,
But his gaze was dim with Night;
'I'll rest by the butte a little while . . .'
And the bronze of his face went white.
So a singer rode in the sunlight space,
Past yucca and ridge and stone,
And a shadow with him, pace for pace,
His own, yet not his own.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Long Road West

Once I heard a Hobo, singing by the tie-trail,
Squatting by the red rail rusty with the dew:
Singing of the firelight, singing of the high-trail
Singing to the morning as the dawn broke through:
'Saddle, rail, or pack-sack—any way you take it:
Choose a pal and try him, but on your own is best.
Sand, clay, or cinders—any way to make it,
Looking for To-morrow down the long road West.'
Far across the ranges, over where the sea swings,
Battering the raw ledge, booming up the sand:
There I heard a sailor telling what the sea sings,
Sings to every sailor when he longs for land:
'When you've saved your cash and when you've done your hitch, sir;
—Holystone and hardtack, buckle to the test—
When you're back in port and your feet begin to itch, sir,
Think about To-morrow and the long road West.'
Slowly came a cowboy riding round the night-herd;
Silver was the starlight, slender was the moon:
Then I heard him singing, lonely as a night-bird,
Pony's head a-nodding to the queer old tune:
'Wind, rain, sunshine—every kind of weather:
Sweating on the mesa, freezing on the crest:
Me and just my shadow, jogging on together,
Jogging on together down the long road West.'
Lazy was the cool stream slipping through the far light
Shadowing the buckthorn high along the hill,
When I heard a bird sing softly in the starlight,
Singing in the evening when the trees were still:
'Valley, range, and high trail, mesa, butte and river:
Sun across the lowlands, rolling down to rest:
There'll always be a skyline, running on forever,
Running on forever, down the long road West.'

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Lost Range

Only a few of us understood his ways and his outfit queer,
His saddle horse and his pack-horse, as lean as a winter steer,
As he rode alone on the mesa, intent on his endless quest,
Old Tom Bright of the Pecos, a ghost of the vanished West.
His gaze was fixed on the spaces; he never had much to say
As he jogged from the Rio Grande to the pueblo of Santa Fè;
He favored the open country with its reaches clean and wide,
And called it his 'sagebrush garden--the only place left to ride.'
He scorned new methods and manners, and stock that was under fence,
He had seen the last of the open range, yet he kept up the old pretense;
Though age made his blue eyes water, his humor was always dry:
'Me, I'm huntin' the Lost Range, down yonder, against the sky.'
That's what he'd say when we hailed him as we met him along the trail,
Out from the old pueblo, packing some rancher's mail,
In the heat of the upland summer, in the chill of the thin-spread snow...
Any of us would have staked him, but Tom would n't have it so.
He made you think of an eagle caged up for the folks to see,
Dreaming of crags and sunshine and glories that used to be:
Some folks said he was loco--too lazy to work for pay,
But we old-timers knew better, for Tim was n't built that way.
He'd work till he got a grub-stake; then drift, and he'd make his fire,
And camp on the open mesa, as far as he could from wire:
Tarp and sogun and skillet, saddle and rope and gun...
And that is the way they found him, asleep in the noonday sun.
They were running a line for fences, surveying to subdivide,
And open the land for the homesteads -- 'The only place left to ride.'
But Tom he had beat them to it, he had crossed to The Other Side.
The coroner picked his jury--and a livery-horse apiece,
Not forgetting some shovels--and we rode to the Buckman lease,
Rolled Tom up in his slicker, and each of us said, 'So-long.'
Then somebody touched my elbow and asked for an old-time song.
Tom was n't strong for parsons--so we did n't observe the rules,
But four us sang, 'Little Dogies,' all cryin'--we gray-haired fools:
Wishing that Tom could hear it and know that we were standing by,
Wishing him luck on the Lost Range, down yonder, against the sky.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Rancho In The Rain

The rabbit's ears are flattened and he's squattin' scared and still,
Ag'inst the dripping cedar; and the quail below the hill
Are huddled up together where the brush is close and thick;
The snow is meltin' on the range and chokin' up the creek;
The clouds are hangin' level, draggin' slow across the plain,
And me? I'm settin' smokin' and a-smilin' at the rain.
There's a saddle that needs mendin' and some overalls that's tore;
But the stock is fed and happy and the milk is on the shelf.
Now a woman would raise ructions at the mud that's on the floor,
But it's rainin' on the rancho--and I'm runnin' things myself.
Kind of lonesome? Well, for some folks, but I'm used to livin' so;
If I feel the need of talkin', there's the puppy and his pranks:
There's the hosses in the stable, munchin' easy-like and slow,
And it's company to feed 'em and to hear 'em nicker thanks.
With my feet ag'inst the fender and the fire a-snappin' bright,
And the smell of burnin' cedar mixin' pleasant with my smoke,
And a-r'arin', tearin' story of the range, that's ribbed up right,
Why lay off and fix the damper where the isinglass is broke?
I'm a-bachin'; that's the answer; takin' orders jest from me,
And I aim to say I'm workin' for a kind of friendly boss,
Not forgettin' there's the Marster that's a-tallyin' to see
If I'm hangin' with the drags or puttin' every deal across.
Kind of simple, this here livin', if a fella keeps his head,
Keeps the stock from gettin' ribby, keeps his fences tight and straight,
Sweats enough to keep him limber, ain't afraid to go to bed
When the boys are up and drinkin', playin' cards, and settin' late.
Ridin' range and punchin' cattle, I've took notice now and then,
That the man who's fair to critters is the kind to reach the top;
He'll be workin' willin' hosses and be workin' willin' men,
But no man is savin' money that will spur 'em till they drop.
But it's rainin'--jest a-roarin' and the desert's drinkin' deep;
On the bunk-house roof the water's talkin' sassy-like and bold,
And the world she looks as if she'd kind of like to go to sleep,
But the rain it sure won't let her--keeps her shiverin' and cold.
Here comes Buddy crost the pasture, buttin' weather strong and stout;
Now I wonder, what's the racket? Yearlin bogged at Mesa Lake!
Hunt the stove--I'll get my slicker. And you could n't git her out?
Well, I reckon we can make it. I'll just saddle up Old Jake.

.....

That's the way it goes with ranchin'--never know what's goin' to come:
Luck or trouble, till it hits you, so you got to guess it, some.
Saved that yearlin'. Mud and leather! But the fire feels good ag'in!
Yes, you got to keep a-guessin' and you'll hit it, now and then.
Night has stitched the clouds together, but she's left a hole or two,
And a mighty slimsy linin' where the water's pourin' through,
But it's feedin' thirsty pasture, makin' hay and makin' grain,
And I'm settin' warm -- and smokin' -- and a-smilin' at the rain.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Shallows Of The Ford

Did you ever wait for daylight
when the stars along the river
Floated thick and white as snowflakes
in the water deep and strange,
Till a whisper through the aspens
made the current break and shiver
As the frosty edge of morning
seemed to melt and spread and change?
Once I waited, almost wishing
that the dawn would never find me;
Saw the sun roll up the ranges
like the glory of the Lord;
Was about to wake my partner
who was sleeping close behind me,
When I saw the man we wanted
spur his pony to the ford.
Saw the ripples of the shallows
and the muddy streaks that followed.
As the pony stumbled toward me
in the narrows of the bend;
Saw the face I used to welcome,
wild and watchful, lined and hollowed;
And God knows I wished to warn him,
for I once had called him friend.
But an oath had come between us--
I was paid by law and Order;
He was outlaw, rustler, killer--
so the border whisper ran;
Left his word in Caliente
that he'd cross the Rio border...
Call me coward? But I hailed him...
'Riding close to daylight, Dan!'
Just a hair and he'd have got me,
but my voice, and not the warning,
Caught his hand and help him steady;
then he nodded, spoke my name,
Reined his pony round and fanned it
in the bright and silent morning,
Back across the sunlit Rio

up the trail on which he came.
He had passed his word to cross it--
and I had passed my word to get him--
We broke even and we knew it;
'twas a case of give-and-take
For old times. I could have killed him
from the brush, instead, I let him
Ride his trail...I turned...my partner
flung his arm and stretched wake;
Saw me standing in the open;
pulled his gun and came beside me;
Asked a question with his shoulder
as his left hand pointed toward
Muddy streaks that thinned and vanished...
not a word, but hard he eyed me
As the water cleared and sparkled
in the shallows of the ford.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Sheep And The Goats

I don't mind working to earn my bread,
And I'd just as soon keep straight;
I've listened to what the preacher said
About rams and sheep at the gate;
I like to sleep in an easy bed,
But I tell you this, old mate:
A man like me, what you call a Bo,
Can blister and sweat and save
All his life, and earn just enough of dough
To prove that he is a slave,
And have, when it comes his time to go,
Well, enough to line his grave.

Say, mate, have you ever seen the mills
Where the kids at the looms spit blood?
Have you been in the mines when the fire-damp blew?
Have you shipped as a hand with a freighter's crew
Or worked in a levee flood?

Have you rotted wet in a grading-camp,
Or scorched on a desert line?
Or done your night stunt with your lamp,
Watching the timbers drip with damp
And hearing the oil-rig whine?

Have you seen the grinders fade and die,
As the steel-dust cut them down?
Have you heard the tunnel-driller's cry
When the shale caved in? Have you stood by
When his wife came up from town?

Have you had your pay held back for tools
That you never saw or could use?
Have you gone like a fool with the other fools
To the boss's saloon, where the strong-arm rules,
And cashed your time for booze?

Well, those are the games—I've played 'em all—
That a man like me can play.

And this lovely world is a hard old ball;
And so at the last I took a fall
To the right and proper way;

And that is to see all the sights you can
Without the admission price.
That's why I've changed to a traveling man,
With a quilt and a rope and a kind of plan
Of hitting no one place twice.

I do no kicking at God or Fate;
I keep my shoes for the road—and I love it, mate;
Hay-foot, straw-foot, that's my gait!
And I carry no other man's load.

For I'm free! Oh, the lowlands by the sea
To the mountains clear across
On the other side, they belong to me;
A man owns nothing unless he's free,
And I am my own good boss.

I don't mind working to earn my bread,
And I'd just as soon keep straight,
But according to what the preacher said,
I'm a ram—and I've missed the gate;
But I'm jogging ahead, and jogging ahead,
And perhaps I'll find it, mate.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Trail-Makers

North and west along the coast among the misty islands,
Sullen in the grip of night and smiling in the day:
Nunivak and Akutan, with Nome against the highlands,
On we drove with plated prow a gleam with frozen spray.

Loud we sang adventuring and lustily we jested;
Quarreled, fought, and then forgot the taunt, the blow, the jeers;
Named a friend and clasped a hand—a compact sealed, attested;
Shared tobacco, yarns, and drink, and planned surpassing years.

Then—the snow that locked the trail where famine's shadow followed
Out across the blinding white and through the stabbing cold,
Past tents along the tundra over faces blotched and hollowed;
Toothless mouths that babbled foolish songs of hidden gold.

Wisdom, lacking sinews for the toil, gave over trying;
Fools, with thews of iron, blundered on and won the fight;
Weaklings drifted homeward; else they tarried—worse than dying—
With the painted lips and wastrels on the edges of the night.

Berries of the saskatoon were ripening and falling;
Flowers decked the barren with its timber scant and low;
All along the river-trail were many voices calling,
And e'en the whimpering Malemutes they heard—and whined to go.

Eyelids seared with fire and ice and frosted parka-edges;
Firelight like a spray of blood on faces lean and brown;
Shifting shadows of the pines across our loaded sledges,
And far behind the fading trail, the lights and lures of town.

So we played the bitter game nor asked for praise or pity:
Wind and wolf they found the bones that blazed out lonely trails...
Where a dozen shacks were set, to-day there blooms a city;
Now where once was empty blue, there pass a thousand sails.

Scarce a peak that does not mark the grave of those who perished
Nameless, lost to lips of men who followed, gleaning fame
From the soundless triumph of adventurers who cherished
Naught above the glory of a chance to play the game.

Half the toil—and we had won to wealth in other station;
Rusted out as useless ere our worth was tried and known.
But the Hand that made us caught us up and hewed a nation
From the frozen fastness that so long was His alone.

.

Loud we sang adventuring and lustily we jested;
Quarreled, fought, and then forgot the taunt, the blow, the jeers;
Sinned and slaved and vanished—we, the giant-men who wrested
Truth from out a dream wherein we planned surpassing years

.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

The Walking Man

Sunny summer day it was when loping in to Laramie,
I overtook the Walking Man, reined up and nodded 'How!!'
He'd been a rider once, I knew. He smiled, but scarce aware of me
He said, 'If you would like me to, I'll tell my story, now.
'They'll tell you that I'm crazy--that my wits have gone to glory,
But you must n't be believing every Western yarn you hear.
The one I'm going to tell you is exceptional--a story
That you've heard perhaps a dozen ways a dozen times a year.'
So he whispered while the shadow of my pony walked beside him,
'If good people go to heaven, do good horses go to hell?'
I slung one leg across the horn and sideways so, I eyed him;
'For I've seen the phantom ponies loping round the Big Corral.
'And I've seen my pony Yuma--yes, the horse that died to save me--
Come and nicker at the golden bars while I stood down below
Calling, 'Yuma! Yuma! Yuma!' and still wonder why he gave me
Such a friend; and why I killed her. It was twenty years ago....
'You remember, it was lonely when we used to guard the cattle;
When a man would ride the line for days and camp at night alone,
With nothing much to do but watch the sun rise up for battle,
And not a soul to talk to, or what's even worse--his own.
'So I taught my pony Yuma many tricks, for she was human;
To rear, shake hands, to nod, or pick up anything I dropped,
Till she grew as interested and as gentle as a woman,
Just to have me praise and pet her; but one day the teaching stopped.
'Three rustlers from the Notch rode up. I knew there would be trouble.
But I sat my pony easy and I rolled a cigarette,
And we talked about the rodeo, when, like a bursting bubble,
The leader opened up the fight. I felt my arm grow wet....
'It was three to one; but Yuma, like a rock, stood to the thunder,
For she seemed to know my need....two empty saddles....when the one
That tried at first to get me spurred up close and swung up under,
And I saw the trail to heaven in the muzzle of his gun.
'I flinched and played the coward. 'Up!' I called, and at the calling
Reared my pony; and she took his shot. I leveled quick and twice
I answered. In the smoke I saw a twisted figure falling;
I could feel by pony shiverTwenty years I've paid the price
'For my life. Yes, Hell-and-Texas leave the hoofprints in some faces;
We, the riders of the ranges, each of us has played his part....
Twenty years!' he whispered slowly. 'Twenty years in many places,

But I've never worn the print of Yuma's hoofprints from my heart.
'I'm the Walking Man forever. But I dream of mighty ranges
And the silent mountain-meadows in the glory of the stars;
And I see the phantom ponies in the dawn and sunset changes,
And I hear my Yuma nicker, just behind the golden bars.'
Sunny summer day it was when loping in to Laramie,
I overtook the Walking Man, reined up and nodded, 'How!':
He walked beside me for a while. He hardly was aware of me,
But I think I understand him, for I know his story now.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

To My Dog,

(In the Happy Hunting Grounds)

Did the phantom hills seem strange, Quien,
When you left the light for the ghostly land?
Do you dream of the open range, Quien,
The tang of sage and the sun-warmed sand?

Does your great heart yearn for the sweep of space,
The desert dawn and the sunset glow,
When we had no care, nor a dwelling-place,
In the lonely land we used to know?

Do you dream of those outland days, Quien,
The fierce, white noon and the pinion~ shade?
The luck we shared on the ways, Quien,
Young and lusty and unafraid?

Comrade, keen for the hunt and kill;
Comrade, patient and strong and wise,
The firelight flares--and I see you still,
Calling me with your wistful eyes.

You cannot know that I cannot come --
My work is here for a while -- and then ...
My heart cries out, though my lips are dumb,
And my hands are chained to the wheel, Quien.

Yet I am glad that your soul is free
To run the trails of our old delight:
Only -- I ask that you wait for me,
And you will know, be it day or night,

Know, and leap at my call, Quien,
And forever pace with pony's stride,
And never a start shall fall, Quien,
And never again our trails divide.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Walking John

Walkin' John was a big rope-hoss, from over Morongo way;
When you laid your twine on a ragin' steer, old John was there to stay.
So long as your rope was stout enough and your terrapin shell stayed on,
Dally-welte, or hard-and-fast, it was all the same to John.

When a slick-eared calf would curl his tail, decidin' he couldn't wait,
Old John, forgettin' the scenery, would hit an amazin' gait;
He'd bust through them murderin' cholla spikes, not losin' an inch of stride,
And mebbe you wished you was home in bed—but, pardner, he made you ride!

Yes, John was willin' and stout and strong, sure-footed and Spanish broke,
But I'm tellin' the wonderin' world for once, he sure did enjoy his joke;
Whenever the mornin' sun came up he would bog his head clear down,
Till your chaps was flappin' like angel wings and your hat was a floatin' crown.

That was your breakfast, regular, and mebbe you fell or stuck.
At throwin' a whing-ding John was there a-teachin' the world to buck.
But after he got it off his chest and the world come back in sight,
He'd steady down like an eight-day clock when its innards is oiled and right.

We gave him the name of Walkin' John, once durin' the round-up time.
Way back in the days when beef was beef and John he was in his prime;
Bob was limpin' and Frank was sore and Homer he wouldn't talk,
When somebody says, 'He's Walkin' John—he's makin' so many walk.'

But shucks! He was sold to a livery that was willin' to take the chance
Of John becomin' a gentleman—not scared of them English pants.
And mebbe the sight of them toy balloons that is wore on the tourists' legs
Got John a-guessin'; from that time on he went like he walked on eggs.

As smooth as soap—till a tourist guy, bogged down in a pair of chaps,
The rest of his ignorance plumb disguised in the rest of his rig—perhaps,
Come flounderin' up to the livery and asked for to see the boss:
But Norman he savvied his number right and give him a gentle hoss.

Yes, Walkin' John, who had never pitched for a year, come the first of June,
But I'm tellin' the knock-kneed universe he sure recollected soon!
Somebody whanged the breakfast gong, though we'd all done had our meat,
And John he started to bust in tow, with his fiddle between his feet.

That dude spread out like a sailin' bat, went floppin' acrost the sky;
He weren't dressed up for to aviate, but, sister, he sure could fly!
We picked him out of a cholla bush, and some of his clothes staid on;
We felt of his spokes, and wired his folks. It was all the same to John.

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Where The Ponies Come To Drink

Up in Northern Arizona
there's a Ranger-trail that passes
Through a mesa, like a faëry lake
with pines upon its brink,
And across the trail a stream runs
all but hidden in the grasses,
Till it finds an emerald hollow
where the ponies come to drink.

Out they fling across the mesa,
wind-blown manes and forelocks dancing,
Blacks and sorrels, bays and pintos,
wild as eagles, eyes agleam;
From their hoofs the silver flashes,
burning beads and arrows glancing
Through the bunch-grass and the gramma
as they cross the little stream.

Down they swing as if pretending,
in their orderly disorder,
That they stopped to hold a pow-wow,
just to rally for the charge
That will take them, close to sunset,
twenty miles across the border;
Then the leader sniffs and drinks
with fore feet planted on the marge.

One by one each head is lowered,
till some yearling nips another,
And the playful interruption
starts an eddy in the band:
Snorting, squealing, plunging, wheeling,
round they circle in a smother
Of the muddy spray, nor pause
until they find the firmer land.

My old cow-horse he runs with 'em:
turned him loose for good last season;
Eighteen years; hard work, his record,

and he's earned his little rest;
And he's taking it by playing,
acting proud, and with good reason;
Though he's starched a little forward,
he can fan it with the best.

Once I called him-almost caught him,
when he heard my spur-chains jingle;
Then he eyed me some reproachful,
as if making up his mind:
Seemed to say, 'Well, if I have to-
but you know I'm living single...'
So I laughed.
In just a minute he was pretty hard to find.

Some folks wouldn't understand it,-
writing lines about a pony,-
For a cow-horse is a cow-horse,-
nothing else, most people think,-
But for eighteen years your partner,
wise and faithful, such a crony
Seems worth watching for, a spell,
down where the ponies come to drink.

Henry Herbert Knibbs