

SONGS OF THE SAGE

SONGS OF THE SAGE CURLEY FLETCHER



GIBBS
SMITH

THE COWBOY POETRY OF CURLEY FLETCHER

Edited and with an Introduction by Hal Cannon

Curley Fletcher's poems have been passed down through generations of cowboys, recited around campfires, learned and relearned.

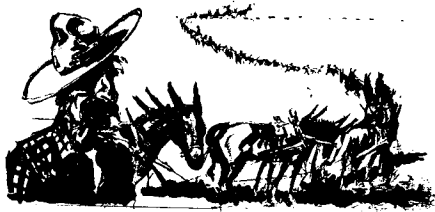
Fletcher wrote this collection for the lovers of the great open spaces—the mountains, valleys, and deserts that form the empire of the West.

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Poetry



THE SAGA OF BORAX BILL

The day of the long line team is o'er,
The long-line teamster is seen no more,
The cadent notes of the leader's chimes
Are forever buried in bygone times.

Old Borax Bill was a tough old pill,
An old case-hardened sinner
Who went his ways in the early days,
An old time long-line skinner.

He knew more schemes for jerk-line teams,
Than anyone of his time;
He could curse by rote and swear by note,
To music, rhythm and rhyme.

He could drive more span than any man,
And where his leaders are
Is out of sight, where it takes till night
For the wheelers to get that far.

For when to go and where to "whoa,"
A long distance telephone
Was hanging near the leaders ear,
To make Bill's wishes known.

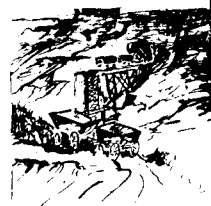
He gave mules hell but he fed them well
And he knew just how to drive;
He could haul more load on a sandy road
Than any man alive.

On his wheeler alone, like a king athrone,
He would tell them what to do
And when he spoke, the hamestrings broke,
Or the chains and stretchers flew.

Old Bill was rough, but he knew his
stuff

On the up grade of a hill,
And a lazy mule was just a fool
To loaf with Borax Bill.

A hybrid late made coyote bait,
Out on the desert's stones.
The team went on in the early dawn,
As the buzzards picked his bones.



He could make a turn with room to burn,
And never a mule to stand,
And when he'd shout the pointers out,
Their bellies would hit the sand.

His voice would ring up in the swing,
Those mules would hop across
Again and again o'er a tightened chain,
For they knew that he was boss.

He kept some rocks in the jockey-box
To throw at a lazy team;
When he shied a stone a mule would groan
And then Old Bill would scream—

“Get out and hit that collar and bit,
You lazy son-of-a-jack,
I’ll be up you, snide, and tan your
hide,
To hang upon the rack.”

He’d often say in his blasphemous
way,
That after he had died
He would be no stranger at the
manger,
Where the souls of mules were tied.

And that Borax Smith was just a myth,
With trimmings in between;
He had blown more borax thru his thorax
Than Smith had ever seen.

Now a mule I judge will hold a
grudge
Until his dying day;
An abusive debt he’ll not forget,
And with interest he’ll repay.

At any rate, one evening late
Old Bill went on the “prod;”
With this in mind he got behind
A mule just newly shod.



With all his might and careful sight
This beast took perfect aim,
In a manner neat with both hind feet
He handed Bill the same.

Oh, what a lick was that mighty kick,
And it caught Bill unaware.
With a dismal howl, and a cursing
growl,
Bill folded up right there.

When he was found upon the ground,
His eyes were seen to glisten
And in his breath was the rattle of death,
As he called for his friends to listen.

From where he lay they heard him say,
“Ain’t he a holy terror,
Here I’m busted by a mule I trusted,
Looks like I made an error.

“Now it may be so that it’s hot below.
Boys, will you do me a turn,
Just send that fool of a kickin’ mule,
Right along with me to burn.”

Old Borax Bill lies o’er the hill,
Now numbered with the dead
And you may laugh at his epitaph,
For here is what it said.

