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"FANNING THE HAMMER."

A New Mexico Sheriff's Opinion of Self-Cockers.

Santa Fe, N. M., March 21st.—Harry Whitehill, ex-sheriff of Grant county and formerly of New York city, was in Santa Fe during much of the legislative session just closed, trying to pass a bill creating Logan county out of Grant. It took the measure three weeks to die of exhaustion, and as Mr. Whitehill had little to do except watching it, he was never too busy to chat about the west or ask questions about his old friends in the east. During a long conversation he remarked:

"It's funny, but every tenderfoot thinks that all cowboys carry double-acting, or some call them self-cocking revolvers. There was a time when these weapons were in high favor, but the cowboys found that they were positively unhandy instead of being a help to a man in a hurry. Now self-cocking pistols are boycotted. I'll bet four-fifths of the cowboys in this territory have gone back to the old style single-acting gun and wouldn't have any other."

"Why, don't they like the new style?"

"Why, they discovered that try as they would, they could not avoid deflecting the muzzle of the pistol to the right while pulling the trigger to raise the hammer. You see all the power is applied from the right hand side of the trigger, where you put your finger in. Now when you pull the trigger for the comparatively long period necessary to get the double-acting hammer up to the point where the spring is released and it falls, you insensibly put a lateral pressure on the right hand side and can't help slightly swaying the muzzle in that direction. When the double-acting guns were in style here we used to notice every single week wounded in this way. Most of these about one half were shot so far to the left that the ball simply grazed their ribs. Another large percentage were shot in the left side of the [illegible] cowboy pr[illegible] the dead [illegible] It is always his [illegible] ball right at the junction of the ribs above the stomach. This is not merely because they want to put on style, the placing of a 48-calibre ball [illegible] prevents your man from coming back at you. Now as soon as the cowboys began to note this queer feature of the shooting, it became a matter of serious moment to them. They quickly found the fault to be in the self-cocker, which by deflecting their m[illegible] inclined the balls toward the left side of the man facing them in front. That settled the self-cocker. The fact that the cowboys were right is proved by the simultaneous disappearance of the new style and reappearance of the old style weapon."

"But can a man shoot faster with the new style weapon?" asked the tenderfoot.

"Did you ever see a man shoot?" asked the ex-sheriff with a quizzical smile. "Why, see here, this is a single-acting old style pistol. Watch that tree."

Before the words were well uttered the handsome sheriff had got the drop on the growing timber and six shots rang out in such rapid succession that they resembled like the explosion of a small pack of very large firecrackers. During the shooting Mr. Whitehill's left fore-finger vibrated, along the top of the pistol barrel from muzzle to breech. The six balls filled the tree about three inches apart.

"Now," [illegible] pistol fixed this way [illegible] ready for use he continued, [illegible] the weapon. It was a .48 calibre, about eighteen inches long and handsomely [illegible] was tied firmly back against the inner side of the guard with a rawhide thong.

"All I have to do with it," explaining the curious guardian, "is to brush the hammer back [illegible] as it will go with my left forefinger while I hold the pistol firmly with my right hand. My right forefinger never goes near the trigger, but he'ps to hold the stock, and [illegible] and certain. When I push back the hammer I have only to take my finger off to let it fall and discharge the pistol. You see the trigger being tied back the hammer is always free. One motion is all that is necessary to push back the hammer and fire the shot. The trick is called 'fanning the hammer.' You see I pushed it back with my left forefinger; it instantly fell when I released it and the next instant my finger was again pushing it back to a full cock. Doing this little act quickly makes your little finger saw back and forth in a way not unlike the fanning motion. That's where it got its name."

"Do all cowboys adopt this plan?"

"Oh, no. Most of them cock the pistol with the forefinger, but some prefer to leave the trigger free, and with each shot apply the slight pressure of the right forefinger necessary to discharge the weapon. There is no pressure to speak of on the trigger, however, and the aim is never spoiled. With a hair-trigger you have only to hold the gun straight and you will get there. When I was sheriff, down in Grant, I always went around with my trigger tied back, and I never carried a self-cocker. Yet I could shoot as quick as any man. If I hadn't I would not be here now. There's Pat Garrett, who used to be sheriff of Lincoln county, which he is now trying to cut in half so as to make Pecos county. He never carried anything but a single acting gun. When he shot Billy the kid he put two balls side by side into Billy's heart before the body struck the floor. The first shot killed Billy, but Pat was not taking any chances and he was working his pistol for all it was worth. Now that second had to follow pretty close after the first in order to get to the same spot before Billy dropped, didn't it? That shows what a good man with a good single acting gun could do. [illegible] double-acting gun [illegible] the new style?"

"Why, yes. When I tried to [illegible] a fellow in Grant one day [illegible] on me suddenly and got [illegible] double acting pistol [illegible] under my [illegible] than [illegible] Of course, I [illegible] back at him as quick as the Lord would let me, and got there. Now you see why I have a poor opinion of double acting pistols. That fellow never missed a man before, and if he had had his old pistol I would be a dead man now."

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