

**A SON OF
THE PLAINS**

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A Son of the Plains by Arthur Paterson

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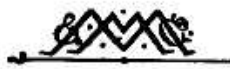
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ARTHUR PATERSON

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BY

ARTHUR PATERSON

AUTHOR OF "A MAN OF HIS WORD," "THE DAUGHTER
OF THE NEZ PÉCÉS," ETC.

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A SON OF THE PLAINS.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TRAIL.

A BROWN line of sandy track six hundred miles long, and fifteen to fifty yards broad, beaten out of the prairie by the hoofs of countless oxen, sheep, and horses, and the feet of men,—such is that great emigrants' thoroughfare from East to West known as the Santa Fé trail.

The source of the trail is at Van Buren City, Arkansas; it ends at Santa Fé, the capital of New Mexico, and so vast has been the traffic over it that even the tough prairie grass has yielded up its life, and not a blade is left upon the track for fully four hundred miles.

A grim record has the Santa Fé trail. All kinds of men pass over it, but it knows the emigrant best,—

and many, very many, have never gone further. Thirst killed them, one by one, as they wearily tramped on and on, expecting the summer rains, which were late that year; or they died, a score at a time, round their blazing wagons, massacred in a night by the Arapahoe Indians.

Nowadays, the journey is comparatively safe; but the observant traveller finds many a memento of the good old times, and when turning over the bones of cattle, horses and sheep by the wayside, will stumble not unfrequently upon the skull of a man.

Twenty years ago, before the trail's deadliest foe, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fé Railway, began to cut it to pieces and extinguish part of it altogether, a man who embarked on a journey across the plains carried his life in his hands. Yet there were men who did it constantly. Stockmen these, bred in the country beyond the trail, whose business it was to bring their produce to the Eastern markets, and who counted such risks as it had to offer them the merest child's play. Every summer, in the months of June and July, when rain may be expected,—though it does not always come,—men with wild-eyed sheep, gaunt long-horned cattle, or wiry broncho ponies, wended their way by easy stages from the mountains and the plains of New

