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The Cattle Kings

By Lewis Atherton. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 308 pages. 1961. \$6.95.

CATTLE RAISING, particularly on the open range, has been more studied, and at the same time, more romanticized, than any other aspect of agricultural history. Beginning in 1930 with Everett E. Dale's *The Range Cattle Industry*, sponsored by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, a number of notable studies have traced the development, financing, and decline of the Western range cattle industry, and have delineated the place of the cowboy, both in reality and in folklore. Now, Lewis Atherton, distinguished historian at the University of Missouri, has written the history of the cattlemen. This fascinating, scholarly study of the rugged individuals who dominated the industry will take its place with other basic studies of the range cattle industry and of the West.

The economist will find this book of importance in assessing the land, labor, and capital which went into the range cattle industry. A combination of factors, which Professor Atherton traces, gave the Great Plains region a competitive advantage in beef production after the Civil War. These included cheap land for grazing when the public domain was opened, better marketing facilities through railroads and the invention of the refrigerator car, and a flow of capital into Western ranching when British corporation laws were modified in the direction of investment trusts.

The opportunity to make a fortune with this favorable combination of circumstances was seized by a number of enterprising, self-reliant young men—most of them between 25 and 35 years of age. The individual cattleman had to be a good businessman with a flair for taking a chance. Generally, individuals were more successful than were the large companies. This was particularly notable after the hard winter of 1886–1887, which marked the trend away from large herds ranged with little care over the public domain to smaller, controlled herds ranged on owned or leased lands.

This study may provide some clues to the problem of economies of size in agriculture.

Mr. Atherton has given the historian, economist, and general reader a brilliant, yet scholarly, account of one aspect of the western cattle industry which has been neglected. His book will be of basic importance for years to come.

Wayne D. Rasmussen