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BUFFALO BILL AND THE LONE CAMPER

By Col. Prentiss Ingraham



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Buffalo Bill and the Lone Camper

OR,

1974

THE REAL "WILD WEST"

BY

Colonel Prentiss Ingraham

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Author of the celebrated "Buffalo Bill" stories published in the
BORDER STORIES. For other titles see catalogue.

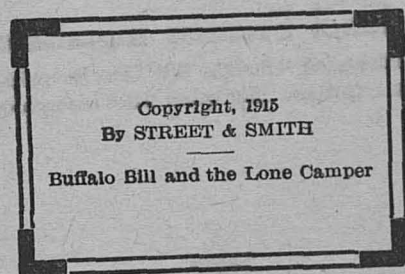


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IN APPRECIATION OF WILLIAM F. CODY (BUFFALO BILL).

It is now some generations since Josh Billings, Ned Buntline, and Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, intimate friends of Colonel William F. Cody, used to forgather in the office of Francis S. Smith, then proprietor of the *New York Weekly*. It was a dingy little office on Rose Street, New York, but the breath of the great outdoors stirred there when these old-timers got together. As a result of these conversations, Colonel Ingraham and Ned Buntline began to write of the adventures of Buffalo Bill for Street & Smith.

Colonel Cody was born in Scott County, Iowa, February 26, 1846. Before he had reached his teens, his father, Isaac Cody, with his mother and two sisters, migrated to Kansas, which at that time was little more than a wilderness.

When the elder Cody was killed shortly afterward in the Kansas "Border War," young Bill assumed the difficult rôle of family breadwinner. During 1860, and until the outbreak of the Civil War, Cody lived the arduous life of a pony-express rider. Cody volunteered his services as government scout and guide and served throughout the Civil War with Generals McNeil and A. J. Smith. He was a distinguished member of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry.

During the Civil War, while riding through the streets of St. Louis, Cody rescued a frightened schoolgirl from a band of annoyers. In true romantic style, Cody and Louisa Federici, the girl, were married March 6, 1866.

In 1867 Cody was employed to furnish a specified amount of buffalo meat to the construction men at work on the Kansas Pacific Railroad. It was in this period that he received the sobriquet "Buffalo Bill."

In 1868 and for four years thereafter Colonel Cody

served as scout and guide in campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. It was General Sheridan who conferred on Cody the honor of chief of scouts of the command.

After completing a period of service in the Nebraska legislature, Cody joined the Fifth Cavalry in 1876, and was again appointed chief of scouts.

Colonel Cody's fame had reached the East long before, and a great many New Yorkers went out to see him and join in his buffalo hunts, including such men as August Belmont, James Gordon Bennett, Anson Stager, and J. G. Heckscher. In entertaining these visitors at Fort McPherson, Cody was accustomed to arrange wild-West exhibitions. In return his friends invited him to visit New York. It was upon seeing his first play in the metropolis that Cody conceived the idea of going into the show business.

Assisted by Ned Buntline, novelist, and Colonel Ingraham, he started his "Wild West" show, which later developed and expanded into "A Congress of the Roughriders of the World," first presented at Omaha, Nebraska. In time it became a familiar yearly entertainment in the great cities of this country and Europe. Many famous personages attended the performances, and became his warm friends, including Mr. Gladstone, the Marquis of Lorne, King Edward, Queen Victoria, and the Prince of Wales, now King of England.

At the outbreak of the Sioux, in 1890 and 1891, Colonel Cody served at the head of the Nebraska National Guard. In 1895 Cody took up the development of Wyoming Valley by introducing irrigation. Not long afterward he became judge advocate general of the Wyoming National Guard.

Colonel Cody (Buffalo Bill) died in Denver, Colorado, on January 10, 1917. His legacy to a grateful world was a large share in the development of the West, and a multitude of achievements in horsemanship, marksmanship, and endurance that will live for ages. His life will continue to be a leading example of the manliness, courage, and devotion to duty that belonged to a picturesque phase of American life now passed, like the great patriot whose career it typified, into the Great Beyond.

BUFFALO BILL AND THE LONE CAMPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LONE CAMP.

"The redskins have taken Doc Miner captive again," said Buffalo Bill, to Pawnee Bill. "But I guess those Indians won't go on the warpath again for some time to come."

"No, the redskins are badly scared," replied Pawnee Bill. "We killed off half the band in trying to capture Doc, and they are terrorized."

"They will take him to their village and so, for the present, Doc is beyond our aid," Buffalo Bill said. "But all the same, I feel that we shall meet him again and will find him alive and well."

This discussion between the two great scouts took place in the Big Horn country, Wyoming, about midway between Fort Aspen and Fort Fetterman. With the scouts were a number of their boys in buckskin, including Pony Bob, Mustang Mark, Lasso Larry, Utah Charlie, and Sport Bender. The entire party, under the leadership of Buffalo Bill, knew that something important was afoot, and that the destination of their present expedition was Lost Valley, a practically unknown region of the West. But just why they were going there had not yet been disclosed by Colonel Cody.

The "Doc Miner" to whom the scouts referred in their conversation, was a gold boomer, the leader of a small band of men who had taken Buffalo Bill captive and then planned to kill him. But the chief gold boomer had saved the life of the chief of scouts at risk of his own life, and thereafter the two became friends.

Later, the scout's new ally was captured by Indians and rescued by Buffalo Bill and his men in a fight in which the Indians suffered heavy loss. Then again Doc Miner was captured by the redskins and again they were driven off by the scouts with heavy loss, though this time they carried their prisoner with them, probably, as the scout believed, to their village.

The immediate purpose of the great scout now was to return to a camp where he had left a wounded negro, named Beelzebub, who was to act as guide for the band of scouts in leading the way to the strange region known as Lost Valley, in which place, according to Beelzebub, a large number of white settlers were in need of help, though just why they needed help Beelzebub refused to state.

The scouts pulled out of their camp at sunrise the morning following that on which Doc Miner had again been captured by the Indians, all now confident that a long trail was before them; for, though Buffalo Bill had not yet told them what his plans were, they felt sure, from the quantity of provisions and extra ammunition brought along, and the direction in which their chief was heading them, that it was no ordinary scouting expedition that they had started upon.

So far, they had had adventure and excitement galore, and yet Buffalo Bill had hinted that it was only child's play to what was before them.

Branching off from the Indian trail they had followed along the river, Buffalo Bill took a north-westerly direction toward the Sweetwater.

They had put upon four Indian ponies which they had brought along with them, the work of carrying the packsaddles, leaving their own extra horses free to use as any one might be needed.

The ride during the day was not a fast one, or a very long one. With three of his men wounded in the fights with the Indians, though slightly, Buffalo Bill spared them all he could.

An early camp was made on a creek a number of miles from the Sweetwater, and the chief was anxious to cover his trail all that he could, and go through a country the Indians would not enter without some good reason.

He did not care to leave a trail that a band of Indians might find and follow.

When the Sweetwater was reached the next day and crossed, the trail led northward, and that night the camp of the gold boomers near the rock fort was reached, the rock fort being the place where Buffalo Bill had been captured by the gold boomers and his life saved by Doc Miner.

"Pards, this is to be our reserve camp for some time," said Cody. "You can herd the horses up the range, where the pasturage is fine, but I would advise you to drive in at night and take possession of this

pile of rocks, for you could hold it against a big force of redskins. I shall leave here before dawn and go alone; but I hope to be back to-morrow night, though, perhaps, not until the following day, for it depends upon the condition in which I find my man.

"Five of you are then to remain in this camp, and the rest will go with me up toward the Big Horn country, and I'll now tell you that our guide will be a black man."

The scouts all looked surprised at this, but Buffalo Bill continued:

"In a certain way he will be our guide, for we are going upon a blind trail, and he is himself lost. But he came from a camp in the Big Horn country, where there are men, women, and children gold hunting, and they are not only lost, but they are in a valley that is unknown to any one so far as I can learn.

"I believe my black friend, who rejoices in the devilish name of Beelzebub, has told the truth, so far as he either knows or dare do it. He came for help for the others, who are in some danger, but what kind of danger he will not tell.

"He was sixty-seven days wandering among the mountains, and I found him when on my way to Fort Aspen, or, rather, he found me, only he was half starved, wounded, and suffering, and had his dead Indians about him to show what the trouble was. He had fought a number of Indians single-handed.

"He is now in a lone camp, where I left him—or I hope he is—and I am going after him, and going

alone. If he is able to go, we will start upon our return to find this lost valley, and we will go on foot."

This was another surprise to the scouts, but they uttered no word against it, and were glad that their chief had let them into his confidence.

That night they slept in the gold boomers' camp near the rock fort, but stated that they would the next day put the rock fort in fine condition for their home.

Before dawn Buffalo Bill arose, and, mounting his pet horse, Buckskin, who knew the trail, he quietly rode away, leaving the scouts in charge of Pawnee Bill.

He rode at a good pace, hoping to get to the negro's camp for an early breakfast, so that he could start back with Beelzebub, take it slowly, and return to the rock fort that night.

At last he reached the lone camp. But he received no greeting. The camp was deserted. The negro was gone!

Buffalo Bill's first act, on making the discovery that the negro was gone, was to bring his rifle around ready for use and to run his eyes over the whole scene, for there might be a foe lurking near, was the thought that entered his mind.

He could not understand the absence of the negro. The time he had set for his return to the negro's camp had not expired.

Had the man been deceiving him, and, less hurt than he had pretended to be, had he gone off as soon as the scout had left him?

This Buffalo Bill could not believe.

After waiting a while, mounted as he was, and sur-

veying the surroundings, Buffalo Bill slipped from his saddle, left his well-trained horse standing, and began to reconnoiter.

There was the camp, but the negro was gone. Then, too, his outfit was gone. The negro's Indian pony was not in sight, either.

Being assured that no one was lurking near, Buffalo Bill began a thorough investigation.

He saw that the camp had been thoroughly broken up. And the negro had certainly not been gone very long. The signs proved that.

Nothing had been left; and there was no sign of a struggle. The camp fire was still warm, and, there being little wood there, it showed that it would not have burned long unless replenished.

A search, that was long and thorough, at last convinced the scout that the negro had not gone alone.

That was assured, for other tracks were seen.

The scout counted six different foot tracks, and they were made by large boots, not by moccasins.

This was in the negro's favor, unless they were companions of his and he had deceived Buffalo Bill from the first.

"I do not believe that, and am sure they were mere uninvited guests. But did they force him to accompany them, or did he go willingly. Then, too, where did they go, and just when?"

Thus musing, Buffalo Bill set out to discover.

First he unsaddled his horse and staked him out to feed. Then he rebuilt the fire to cook his breakfast, for he always went prepared in that way.

His search of the surroundings failed to find any hoof tracks, save that of the Indian pony.

After breakfast, he made a wide and complete circuit of the lone camp.

He made two discoveries. First, the men had not come there mounted, but on foot. Second, they had left in company with the Indian pony. Then, too, they had come from the northward.

They had returned the way they had come. They had left the camp the day before, so the signs read.

Having decided that the men, six in number, had come from the northward—come on foot—stumbled upon the negro's camp, and then retraced their way, taking him and the pony with them, Buffalo Bill mounted Buckskin and started off upon their trail.

Had the negro gone willingly or by force, was the question.

Then, too, who were the six men? Were they gold boomers?

Whence had they come, for their trail led from an unknown country.

One thing Buffalo Bill was particularly glad of, and that was that the direction the trail led was northward, the way he intended to take to the Big Horn country.

After following the trail for several hours, and seeing that it still held its northward trend, the scout decided to branch off and return to his men at the rock fort.

He bore away to the right, and set out at a good

pace to reach camp early and have all ready for an early start in the morning.

He was determined now to go mounted, taking two of the men along to bring the horses back to the reserve camp when they had come up with those with whom the negro had gone off.

Buckskin, therefore, was kept at a brisk pace, and before sunset, Buffalo Bill rode up to his camp and was greeted with a cheer.

Dismounting, the chief told Pawnee Bill and his men the result of his day's work, and added:

"We will start before dawn, go mounted, and two of the boys of the reserve force can go along to bring our horses back if all goes well. The men we seek are on foot; we can catch them by to-morrow night or noon the next day, at any rate. But we must go prepared for our journey northward, as first intended."

CHAPTER II.

THE PURSUIT.

During the day at the reserve camp the scouts had worked like beavers.

They had built a rock corral in which to keep the horses at night, and with a protected passageway leading to it, that the animals could be led into the fort if need be.

The whole place had been thoroughly cleaned, and a discovery had been made that a rock in one corner hid the entrance to a tunnelliike cave, leading several hundred yards underground to a cliff, where there was a fine spring of water.

As this spring was in the side of the cliff, it could not be cut off, and, in case of a siege, men and horses could get all the water necessary.

The rock cabin was, therefore, found to be a fort, indeed, and Buffalo Bill was more satisfied with leaving his reserve there; for, with provisions in plenty, and water, they could stand a long siege, and he told the men that their first duty must be to cut grass in the meadow for hay, and it could be stowed away in a rock addition they could build, to feed the horses with in case of a siege by Indians.

All arrangements were made that night for a start in the morning, and an hour before dawn the men rode out of camp.

Two of the reserve force went along, to return with the horses, and they were pack animals for carrying the packs the men were to carry in their tramp on foot in search of the Lost Valley.

It was noon when the trail of the six men and the negro was struck, and it was well for the scouts that the Indian pony was along, or they would have found it a very difficult task following the trail of men on foot.

The trail was found a score of miles northward of where Buffalo Bill had branched off from it the day before, for he had an idea of the way it led, and took the chance of crossing it far beyond.

As the pace had been a good one all day, the trail looked very fresh when the night camp was made, and, calculating the speed of those on foot, the chief said:

"We'll catch them early to-morrow, boys."

The next morning all was ready for a move as soon as it was light enough to see the trail, and they were not very long in coming upon the camp where the party had passed the night.

The fire had been put out, to prevent its smoke from attracting the attention of roving bands of redskins, should any be about, but the ashes were yet warm.

"Another hour will bring them in sight," said Buffalo Bill. And in this he was right.

There were six white men, the negro, and the Indian pony.

They were a couple of miles out upon the plain.

Taking his glass, the chief looked long and atten-

tively at them, while his men stood by, eagerly waiting for him to report.

"Pards, I don't know any of them except the negro, as far as I can now judge," he said. "They have got the pony packed heavily, and that is not all, for they are making the negro also carry a heavy load."

"Shame! and he wounded as he is," said Pawnee Bill, and he expressed the sentiments of all.

"That means that they are not his friends, Pawnee; and, I believe they are gold boomers, who found the negro in camp, and the pony, and are making them carry their packs; but where on earth are they going in this direction, and tramping back over the very trail they came?"

None of the scouts seemed able to answer this, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, we have got them in sight, and it will never do to lose sight of them in this plain, for we could not pick up their trail, perhaps, for days. If they are good men and true, recognizing us to be white men, they will be all right. If they are outlaws, then they will show fight.

"Pards," Cody continued, "that looks like a waterless plain, so we'll give our horses a good drink at that little brook, fill our canteens, and be prepared for what is before us. If those fellows do not look behind them, we may get well up before we are discovered."

The men dismounted at the brook, threw off their saddles for a quarter of an hour's rest, filled their

canteens, and, their horses having had a slight bunch of grass, they mounted, and rode off on the plain.

The men in advance had gotten all of three miles farther away, meanwhile, and were a long distance off.

Buffalo Bill set the pace, and soon reduced the distance, and it was kept up until the party ahead were little over a mile away.

"They see us, pards," suddenly said Pawnee Bill.

It was true, as all could see by the excited movements of the men.

Some one had looked behind and seen the scouts. Instantly the pursued men turned square off from the way they had been traveling and went rapidly toward a timber waste.

It was about a half acre in size, rose in a slight mound, and was a pile of rocks overgrown with a thicket.

"They've got a strong fort right at hand," said Pawnee Bill.

"We were unfortunate to strike them so near it," said Buffalo Bill.

The scouts were walking their horses now, and were watching the others closely.

They saw them reach the waste, and disappear from sight.

After a while, two of the men appeared upon a rock that rose above the thicket, and one was seen to turn a glass upon the scouts.

The two alternately looked through the field glasses for quite a while, talked excitedly, and disappeared.

Buffalo Bill still led on as before. He had raised his field glass to his eyes and made remark that six determined men could, in that waste, stand off a large attacking force.

When they reached the spot whence the men had looked back and discovered them, Buffalo Bill kept straight on.

If the men in the waste were congratulating themselves that they had not been seen, their joy was short-lived; for, after getting well by, Buffalo Bill turned to the left, and began to circle entirely around the thicket.

He was about four hundred yards away from the waste, and, as he knew what his rifle could do, he wanted to find out what the weapons of the six men could accomplish at that range.

Out in the open plain as they were, the scouts would be at a terrible disadvantage, for they could not even see their foes.

The men in the waste, not counting the negro, were six; the scouts were ten in number, but this little advantage numerically did not weigh against the others' position.

But were they friends or foes? That question was to be decided. Having circled entirely around the waste, Buffalo Bill called a halt.

Then they all dismounted, the horses were unsaddled, and the chief, with a white handkerchief in his hand, stepped out from the others. No one could be seen at the motte. All was as silent as death there.

Walking a few paces, the chief laid his rifle upon

the ground, took off his belt, and, holding up his hands, with the white signal of peace fluttering above his head, he began his walk toward the waste.

He knew that his every movement was seen from the waste. What would be the result?

"Don't go too far, chief," called out Pony Bob.

"Let me go," and Pawnee Bill started toward the chief.

"Go back!" was the stern command, and Buffalo Bill walked on.

A dozen more paces had he gone when there came a sharp report, a bullet hit the hard earth to one side of the scout, and went ricocheting along.

It was an unmistakable command to halt.

Buffalo Bill was covered with fine sand, cut up and scattered by the bullet. He promptly halted, wheeled, and called out:

"How far did that bullet go, boys?"

"It fell just yonder," and Pawnee Bill ran and picked up the piece of lead.

"I wonder if that was fired by their best gun." And with this, Buffalo Bill held his flag of truce higher, and once more moved on.

"Don't go!" came in a chorus from the scouts.

"They will kill you," cried Pawnee Bill.

"If they do kill me, protected by a flag of truce, you men know that it means no quarter to murderers!" cried Buffalo Bill, in tones he knew must reach the ears of those who had fired upon a white flag.

"We know! We'll avenge you, Buffalo Bill!" came in a savage roar from the scouts.

That those in the waste heard their threat there was no doubt.

Then Buffalo Bill moved on again, and a dozen paces nearer he went, when there came the stern command:

"Halt!"

He obeyed.

As no more was said, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Well, I have halted."

"If you value your life, go your way with your men, Buffalo Bill."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who we are; but you leave this country."

"I have a right here, as an officer attached to the army, and you have not."

"We have the right to protect ourselves."

"I have come to you under a flag of truce, which you have failed to respect."

"We respect nothing. Go your way, and leave us to go ours."

"Will you surrender your prisoner?"

"What prisoner?"

"You know well whom I mean."

"I do not."

"The negro, then."

There was a silence of over a minute.

It was evident that the words of the scout had surprised them; that they had not suspected he knew that the negro was with them.

"What is your answer?" called out the scout, tired of waiting for a reply.

"We have no prisoner."

"The negro is with you."

"He is a comrade, not a prisoner."

Buffalo Bill was slightly taken aback at this. Could it be true?

But, no; if a comrade, would the wounded negro be carrying a pack half as heavy as did the pony?

No; it was but a game to deceive him, and he replied:

"I know who and what the man is, and demand his release."

"You won't get him."

"Let him answer if he prefers to remain with you or come to us."

"He will not answer."

"Have you killed him?"

"We would not kill a comrade."

"Who are you?"

"That is none of your business, Buffalo Bill."

"You know me, as I do you, and I demand, as an officer of the government, that you surrender and save yourselves further trouble."

"If you know us, and I believe you do, you must know, then, that we are not men likely to surrender to you and be hanged for our crimes. No, we are desperate men at bay, Buffalo Bill, and if you take us, it will be our dead bodies," came the clear and determined response.

Buffalo Bill's eyes were opened by the reply.

In saying that he knew them, he had meant that they were gold boomers.

The reply had proven that they were far worse law-breakers than men who were invading a forbidden land, and thus stirring up strife with the Indians, which reflected upon honest settlers elsewhere.

But he wished to know more of them before acting, so answered:

"In a land where white men are few and far between, when they meet they should be friends. We saw you, and only your hostile attitude caused us to go slow and greet you under a flag of truce. You dishonored it by firing at me, and now you say you are at bay and will fight us. Why should you do this?"

"We are not of your stripe, Buffalo Bill, as you well know, for you talk smooth to entrap us."

"Who are you?"

"You don't deceive us by pretending not to know."

The scout was about to reply that he did not know, upon his honor, when Pawnee Bill said, in a low tone:

"Go slow, chief; I know them."

Showing no sign of having heard Pawnee Bill's words, the chief returned:

"Well, what are you going to do? Talk quick."

"Fight."

"You refuse to submit?"

"Yes."

"Upon no terms?"

"You know that you have no power to grant us terms, and that we would hang as soon as you took us to the fort."

"It is the band known in the Southwest, chief, as the Six Satans, I feel sure," came in low tones from Pawnee Bill, and he added: "I know that man's voice—call him Snaky Sam."

"Well, Snaky Sam, you have got to fight," said Buffalo Bill, in a determined tone.

"Aha! I thought you said you did not know me," was the exultant answer, and a bullet cut through the rim of Buffalo Bill's sombrero.

CHAPTER III.

THE "SIX SATANS."

Each one of the scouts answered that shot which had so nearly ended the life of Buffalo Bill.

He was a hundred yards nearer to the waste than they were, and Pawnee Bill had told the men to be ready to fire at a word; so each one had his rifle ready.

The shot at their chief carried a volley at the spot whence the puff of smoke was seen.

This volley, beyond doubt, saved Buffalo Bill's life, for it was so wholly unlooked for, so quickly fired, that it sent the bullets tearing into the waste.

At the moment he had fired, Pawnee Bill dashed forward with Buffalo Bill's horse, at the same time telling the scouts to fall back, out of range.

"Well done, Pawnee," cried the chief, and, leaping into his saddle, he dashed back with Pawnee Bill, to get out of range.

They had hardly done so when there came several shots from the timber, but the bullets did no harm.

Buffalo Bill was too wise a man to stand unprotected on the plain and argue with men who had shown that they would be merciless.

Keeping at a gallop for a short distance, the scouts halted, and they were glad to see that the shots of their foes fell short, while they knew that their rifles would throw a bullet far beyond the motte.

"Pards, I thank you. That volley saved me, as it kept those other fellows from firing," said Buffalo Bill. "I only hope it did not kill the negro."

"He seems to have struck the right party, his name being Beelzebub, and they are the Six Satans," Pawnee Bill said, and the scouts all laughed at the coincidence, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"The Six Satans, as I understand, Pawnee, are a gang of Arizona desperadoes, who secretly did a great deal of deviltry, but were found out, arrested after they had killed a sergeant and two soldiers, and escaped from Fort Defiance later by killing their guard. They were pursued, but got away, and word was sent to the forts of the Northwest to look out for them, but they were not seen by any one who knew them."

"Yes, that's the gang. They have committed more murders and robberies than any band of men in the Southwest, and I knew each one of them before they were known as the secret devils they proved to be. They came North a year ago, and there is a big price on the head of each one of them.

"They were last heard of in Cheyenne, and I believed that they had gotten out of the country, but it seems they have not. Their leader, Snaky Sam, is as desperate as they make them, and they have vowed never to surrender, and to take their own lives rather than do so, when they know that all hope is gone."

"They are the men I have heard of, Pawnee, and they must have gone on up into the Big Horn country and been in hiding—perhaps have been gold hunting and have struck it rich, so were making their way out

again, when they came upon the negro. But why they should have turned right back upon their trail I do not understand.

"If that volley you all fired did not kill Beelzebub Black, he is certainly in very devilish company. But we are going to camp right here on their trail, to take them or drive them to suicide."

A cheer greeted these words of the chief, and the scouts then waited for orders.

The men in the motte, having found that their bullets fell short, had ceased firing, and all was silence there.

The scouts were grouped several hundred yards distant upon the plain, and with no shelter near.

Far away, beyond the motte, was a ridge where Buffalo Bill's experienced eye told him there was water and grass. It was some five miles distant, however.

"Pards," he said, after a moment of thought, "yonder is grass and water beyond a doubt. There we can keep the horses, half at a time, and two of you boys can keep charge of them.

"We'll camp around that little abode of the Satans, having our camp right here, while we can encircle the place day and night. We all have our canteens for water, and can come in here to our camp one at a time for food, by day only, for we must keep our posts at night and wide awake, or those Six Satans will get our horses and be off.

"They have not much food, I feel sure, and we can starve them into surrender or death, for there is no water where they are. Boys, you know what to

do; but half the horses are to be kept here day and night, for quick use if needed."

Again the men cheered, and at once set to work to carry out their chief's orders.

The camp was pitched on the open plain.

Their movements showed the Six Satans that they had to stand a siege. It revealed to them that Buffalo Bill was in deadly earnest.

The chief rode with two men over to the ridge to get a view of the land from every side.

Arriving at the ridge, the scouts found there a small stream, good pasture land, and plenty of wood.

A second camp was pitched there, the horses were watered and staked out, and supper was cooked, Buffalo Bill intending to take it back to the camp on the plain.

Signals were agreed upon as a call for help, one of the two men to be constantly upon the watch.

It was to be the raising of a red flannel shirt for a flag by day, the lighting of a fire by night.

Each morning one of the men was to come out with the day's food for those on the plain and bring the horses, taking the others back.

Wood was gathered up for fires on the plain when a signal at night was needed, and, tied in bundles, was swung across a horse.

A pole was taken along for a flag by day when needed as a signal, and, with his bag of provisions, the chief mounted and started upon his return.

Sleeping by day, the scouts could watch by night,

and each man had mentally vowed that there was no escape for the Six Satans.

When the sun was setting, Buffalo Bill quietly began to pace to and fro upon his post.

The other scouts did the same, and the horses out upon the plain, stood silent and discontented, for their instinct told them that there was water and grass where their companions had been taken.

Night came on, the farther scouts faded from view, then those nearer, and soon all was darkness upon the plain, and a silence that was intense could almost be felt by the watchers.

The night passed away and the dawn came, revealing each scout upon his post.

Silence still brooded upon the besieged outlaws.

There had been no fire at night, no smoke was seen now by day to show that they were cooking their meals.

Far over toward the ridge one of the scouts in the camp there was seen coming out with the horses and breakfast.

He came straight to the camp, and Buffalo Bill signaled for two of the men to come in, which they did.

The supply of food was for the day and plentiful.

The horses brought out were left at the camp; the others, thirsty and hungry, were taken back.

"Any sign of the outlaws?" asked the scout from the ridge.

"Not a sign or a sound all night."

So each scout reported as he came in for his breakfast.

Noon had come and gone, and Buffalo Bill raised a white flag on the pole and advanced toward the waste as far as he dared. A shot halted him, the spent bullet falling at his feet.

He waved the flag, and he was surprised at the result. A man stepped out of the thicket and moved something meant to be white, but which was dirt color.

"Ho, there!" shouted the chief, and the scout farther off heard his clear tones.

"I'll meet you halfway," cried the outlaw.

"Aye, aye, come along!"

Buffalo Bill at once walked forward, carrying his flag with him.

The man also advanced, but slowly. At last Buffalo Bill halted. He had gotten to where the scouts had halted the day before when he had advanced toward the waste.

"You must come here, Snaky Sam."

"I'll come halfway."

"I'll go you," and Buffalo Bill boldly walked the distance.

The outlaw advanced slowly and with evident dread.

"Well?"

"What do you want, Buffalo Bill?"

"Your surrender."

"We won't."

"Then we can't trade."

"We can."

"What have you to offer?"

"The nigger."

"Ah! You wish to trade him?"

"Yes, for you want him."

"I might and I might not."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want a dead negro."

The scout watched the face of Snaky Sam closely as he spoke.

"He's not dead."

"You are sure?"

"He's all right, for we are not fools to destroy our stock in trade."

"All right; what do you want, Snaky Sam?" and Buffalo Bill eyed the man from head to foot.

The face of the man looked haggard, and Buffalo Bill felt that it had a half-starved look.

"If you'll allow us to go our way, we'll leave the nigger safe and sound."

"No, we'll wait and take him."

"No, you won't."

"Why not, for you are as safe as rats in a cage?"

"If you don't accept our terms, we'll kill the nigger before your eyes, and then fight it out with you."

The scout did not allow an expression on his face to change, as he replied:

"What good is the negro to us, for he is simply a border wanderer, whom I found wounded and cared for, and whom you found later, and have since subsisted upon the provisions he had, for yours were about run out?"

The man looked surprised, while he asked:

"Is not the nigger your pard?"

"He is just what I told you, a poor devil I found half dead, and whom I never saw before. I will feel sorry to have you kill him, but then his life must not weigh in the balance against Snaky Sam and his band, the Six Satans, especially when I have you all in my power."

"That settles it, the nigger must die."

"I can't help that, but I will say that if you kill him in revenge because you cannot escape through him, I'll turn you over to one of my men, who is very anxious to burn you all at the stake, and he will do it if we find that black man dead."

"Who is it you speak of?"

"Pawnee Bill, a scout on your trail."

"My God! Is he here?"

"Yes, he is one of my men, and it is strange you did not recognize him."

"It is the big fellow; yes, I know him now, so we can't come to terms, can't trade;" and the outlaw turned on his heel and walked back toward the waste.

CHAPTER IV.

A DARING RECONNOISSANCE.

Buffalo Bill stood watching the man as he walked away, while a strange expression came over his face. He had made the threat he did, in connection with Pawnee Bill's name, to note its effect.

It had been wonderful, for the face of the outlaw had shown strange emotions. Pawnee Bill was certainly well known to him.

That the outlaws had had reason to fear Pawnee Bill there was no doubt in Buffalo Bill's mind, for the mention of his name had shut out all possibility of making terms from Snaky Sam's standpoint.

Buffalo Bill saw Snaky Sam walk away like a man without hope. He half expected a shot from Snaky Sam or from one of his men in the waste.

But none came and the scout returned in safety to his camp.

The eye of each of his men was upon him. They wondered what had been decided upon. A glance over toward the ridge showed one of the men there coming out with the horses and supper for the men.

"No terms, pards," called out Buffalo Bill, and the scouts heard and shouted.

Supper was brought out, the horses changed, and the man from the ridge went back.

"Keep a bright lookout to-night for a signal, pard,

for something is going to happen," called out the scout as the man rode away.

Pawnee Bill was the scout then in camp with Buffalo Bill getting his supper, and he was told what had occurred at the meeting with Snaky Sam.

"He knew I was on his trail and had vowed to show no mercy, for they killed my pards," said Pawnee Bill, and he added: "What will you do to-night?"

"You think it best to make some move?"

"They'll never surrender alive, never! When they get good and hungry and see that there is no hope, they'll end it all."

"Kill themselves?"

"Yes, or come out and kill and be killed—Snaky Sam is a dead-game man."

"Well, I believe we can save time by ending it for them."

"How so?"

"The nights are very dark, and by creeping in from our posts upon the waste, we can locate and attack them at close quarters. I will go in first and reconnoiter, then make the rounds of the line and get the men, and we can win."

"I believe we can, though we will lose some of our men, for they are game."

"We may have to remain here for a week, perhaps longer, for the negro has food, you know, and they must have a little. We cannot spare the time, and then it is the only way I can see to save the negro, for they'll starve him sure, if not kill him."

"You are right. Shall I put the boys on to it?"

"No, for the outlaws might suspect something, seeing me go the rounds. They will not expect us to attack and risk a fight with desperate men as long as we have them sure by waiting, so they will keep poor watch, I am certain."

"All right. Count on me to be there," and Pawnee Bill went back to his post.

The men came in for their supper one by one, and darkness again fell upon the scene.

Several hours passed, and then Buffalo Bill began to prepare for his dangerous reconnoissance of the position of the outlaws.

He rolled up several blankets very close, tied stirrup leathers and stirrups to them, and bound them to a couple of the heaviest saddles.

When completed, this made a cumbersome but very secure shield against bullets.

Hanging this with a lariat about his neck, Buffalo Bill walked toward the waste until he got within a hundred yards.

Then he stooped low and began to crawl forward noiselessly, the shield rising from the ground to above his head, and if a shot or shots were fired at close range, it would surely check them.

Nearer and nearer the scout crept to the waste, until at last he reached the thicket unseen, and crouching there, he heard voices not very far from him.

The outlaws were awake, if not watchful.

Buffalo Bill had crept into the motte unseen. The

outlaws supposed the scouts would take no chances of an attack when they had them so surely by waiting.

So Buffalo Bill reached their stronghold and began to reconnoiter. He saw the reflection of the fire; and he gained a rock from where he could look down upon the group.

He counted six, and felt relieved no one was upon guard, as he had feared. The light of the fire revealed every face distinctly. It also revealed poor Beelzebub lying bound near the group.

The scout could hear the groans of the unfortunate negro and they went to his heart. He felt that the man must be released quickly.

What the outlaws were talking about Buffalo Bill could not distinguish, but their faces showed that they were in deadly earnest in all they said.

"I must lose no time. We can all reach the motte and then we can act."

So saying, the chief of scouts retraced his way. He did not need his shield now, so it was left at the edge of the thicket. Rapidly, he walked out upon the plain to his first scout. It was Pony Bob. He was alert, and, recognizing the chief, said:

"What's up, chief?"

"Bob, go around the circle and bring all the boys here. Lose no time, keep out on the circle line in coming, and make no sound to show the outlaws where we are."

"All right, sir."

Away Pony Bob went at a trot, as noiseless as a panther's tread.

Buffalo Bill now saw a form advancing. It did not take a second glance to recognize the tall form and broad shoulders of Pawnee Bill.

"Pawnee, I have been to the outlaws' camp."

"Just like you, Cody."

"They are keeping no watch, but are holding a powwow, and something is up."

"Good!"

"They are around a small fire, and the negro is lying near. I shall return to the timber, but you wait here and bring the men when they all come."

"I will."

"Now I'll go."

With this, Buffalo Bill again crept toward the thicket.

He reached it unchallenged, got to the rocks, and looked down toward the fire. The men were all there, but standing up now. The negro still lay where he had been before, but was groaning more pitifully now.

Snaky Sam was talking louder than before, and Buffalo Bill caught a few words. What he heard caused him to retrace his way to the edge of the thicket. Just as he reached there, he saw his scouts coming.

They were stooping low, coming in a line, and not thirty feet away.

"Ho, pards!"

"Chief."

"We have no time to lose."

"All ready, sir."

"Follow me in Indian file."

"Aye, aye."

"Have your rifles ready for quick work, and I'll show you a thrilling picture."

The chief of scouts led the way into the thicket, and close behind him followed his men in single file.

They climbed noiselessly over the rocks, and at last reached a point where they saw a glimmer of light.

"In line!"

They silently obeyed. From where they stood now they could see the six outlaws.

They could also see the negro and hear his pitiful groans.

The outlaws were standing up in a line. They had their revolvers drawn, and Snaky Sam was talking.

The men stood with bowed heads, and the light of the fire falling upon their faces showed that they were livid, had thrown aside their hats, and were strangely nervous.

"Pards, we get what comfort we can in killing the nigger first. He is what Buffalo Bill is after. Fire at the word as I give it, and fill him full of lead. Then we'll grasp hands across, look each other squarely in the face to show that no one of us shrinks from keeping an oath, to die by his own hand, and then, when I give the word 'Fire'! pull trigger."

"We will!"

Every word that Snaky Sam uttered was heard by the scouts. The voices in chorus were also heard distinctly. And the deep groans of poor Beelzebub reached their ears, too.

"Are you ready, pards?"

Snaky Sam's voice rang out distinctly and without a tremor.

But it was Buffalo Bill's voice that uttered the command:

"Fire!"

CHAPTER V.

A DEVIL TO THE LAST.

The scouts fired at the word of their chief. The roar of the rifles was terrible, breaking in as it did upon the stillness of the night.

The negro was seen to spring halfway to a standing position, and then fall back, rolling in apparent agony.

But the six outlaws had sunk in their tracks as one man.

All lay motionless, save Snaky Sam.

The Indian pony, hidden among the rocks, snorted wildly, and plunged about in a vain effort to get away.

Down toward the camp, over rocks and through bushes, rifles in hand, the scouts followed their leader.

The loud tones of their chief were heard:

"Ho! Beelzebub, you are not hurt, for we fired those shots."

The scouts did not doubt but that the negro believed that the outlaws had fired, and that he was full of bullets.

But he could not reply, and only groaned.

Reaching the fire, more wood was thrown on it by some, others pulled the outlaws apart from the ghastly group, and Buffalo Bill cut the bonds that held a gag in the negro's mouth, while Pony Bob began to untie the lariat from his feet, another scout doing the same to release his hands.

"Here's my canteen," and the scout poured water into the dry and inflamed mouth of the black.

It nearly choked him, but slowly he revived, though he could not speak.

But the scout's words were reassuring, for the negro was told that he was all right; that the outlaws were dead, the scouts had fired that volley, and he would soon be as good as ever.

Seeing that Beelzebub was recovering, Buffalo Bill turned to Pawnee Bill, who had called him.

"Well, Pawnee?"

"The head devil still lives."

"Snaky Sam?"

"But mortally wounded, surely?"

"He must be; but you look at him."

Another fire had been lighted, and where there was more room.

Lying near it was the leader of the Six Satans. He was breathing hard, and his breast was stained with blood. But his eyes were open and he was conscious.

He had recognized Pawnee Bill, who had placed him in as comfortable a position as possible, and had said:

"Beyond your reach now, Pawnee."

As Buffalo Bill knelt by his side, there was only sympathy in the scout's look and tone:

"I am sorry you are suffering, pard, and wish you had been as fortunate as your comrades."

"From your lips I believe that, Buffalo Bill. But my wounds are mortal."

"Yes, they cannot be otherwise. You have not long to live, but I wish to make you as comfortable as I

can. If you have any last wish to make known, I will see that it is faithfully carried out."

"Thank you. But I will die in silence as to the past, and those that do not know me as I am, need never learn the fate of one, strange as it may seem to you, they love and trust. I will simply be registered as 'fate unknown,' with thousands of others."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, and the scouts stood in silence, looking on.

The scout had removed his hat, for he stood in the presence of death. The others had followed his example.

Beelzebub sat not far away, sipping water from a canteen to cool his throat and get back his voice.

It was a strange, ghastly scene, one not to be forgotten. After a short silence, the outlaw leader spoke again:

"You gave the order to fire when it was upon my lips, Buffalo Bill."

"Yes."

"You knew that we intended to kill the nigger?"

"Yes."

"You saved him."

"We were just in time."

"My men intended to kill themselves."

"I heard your words of how you were oath-bound."

"But I did not intend to kill myself."

"You did not?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"Oh, no, born a devil, I would have been a devil to the last."

"How do you mean?"

"I did not intend to kill myself, but the others did. The men had given me a lot of gold to hide from you; but I left it right over there. If the nigger had died, and my men, too, I intended to grab that gold, run to the edge of the thicket, and when you and your scouts came here on the jump I would have slipped out, reached your camp, and, taking the horses you have there and the outfit, make a run of it for where our other treasure is hidden.

"I would have had a long start, a number of horses to ride, while you could not easily trail me across this plain, and never could have caught me.

"Yes, I intended to be a devil until the last, and have gone my way alone; but you thwarted me, and now I'll die with the secret untold of where that fortune in gold is hidden. Ha, ha, ha! that will be your punishment, Buffalo Bill; ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh was one full of fiendish triumph, and Buffalo Bill looked at the man in actual horror.

He had seen many a man die, but never one who was so hardened as was this one.

He uttered no word, simply placed the canteen of water to the lips of the man and did what he could to relieve his intense suffering, for though Snaky Sam uttered no outcry, no groan, all saw that he was quivering with mortal anguish.

As the dying man seemed to desire to remain silent, Buffalo Bill did not disturb his last moments by asking any questions.

He simply ordered Pony Bob to go out to the camp

and bring the horses to the motte, and Utah Charlie accompanied him.

Beelzebub was getting better, but yet spoke no word. He was busy gargling his throat, and between gargles watching the dying outlaw with an admixture of horror and dread upon his face. Thus half an hour passed away.

Pony Bob and Utah Charlie returned with the horses and outfit, made them fast in the thicket, and came back to the fire.

The dying outlaw had not spoken since they had been gone.

He was breathing harder and more rapidly now.

As they joined the circle again, the eyes of Snaky Sam opened. Twice he made an effort before he spoke, and then, in a husky tone, came the words:

"While I can, I'll say good-by, Buffalo Bill, and you, too, boys."

A struggle, a gasp, and the body of the man writhed in agony as the life spark that had animated it went out like the flame of a candle.

Buffalo Bill bent over, clasped the hands upon the broad breast, closed the eyes, a short while before so full of fire, defiance, and pluck, and then said:

"Pards, be his sins what they may, I never saw a braver man."

And this was the verdict of each of the daring men who stood with uncovered heads, gazing down upon the clay which the flight of the spark of life had left to crumble back to dust.

The sound of hoofs approaching at a run out on

the plain told the scouts that their comrades were coming from the camp by the ridge, for, though no signal had been given them, they had doubtless heard the firing and thought they were needed.

The next minute one of the two men dashed up and had with him all the horses.

This decided Buffalo Bill upon going to the ridge right off, carrying the outfit of the outlaws, the pony, and all else with them; the bodies as well, for there the soil was too hard to dig a grave in.

The start was soon after made; Beelzebub mounting his Indian pony.

The negro could not yet speak, so swollen and inflamed the gag had made his throat and mouth, and the bonds had caused his ankles and wrists to swell up and be painful.

Once in the camp by the ridge, however, the negro was kindly cared for, and at once dropped off to sleep; the scouts soon after following his example.

Sunrise showed a pleasant camping place in a meadow under a cliff, and upon the banks of a small stream, and Buffalo Bill determined to remain there until the following morning and allow the men and horses to fully recuperate.

Then, too, he wished Beelzebub to get in trim again.

He was glad to find that the giant negro could speak once more, and the swelling in his limbs had gone down.

The scouts gazed at the black with decided interest. His giant physique, bold yet kindly face, and the

mysterious journey that he had come upon, interested them.

They could not understand about these people of the Lost Valley, and wondered why he did not tell more about them, and just why Buffalo Bill had been sent for.

Breakfast over, the scouts set to work to dig a large grave for the outlaws, and as pick and shovels had been brought along, it was not a difficult task.

The bags of gold which Snaky Sam had decided to appropriate, were found to be equal to several thousand dollars in value, and this was to go into the scout's treasury, to be equally divided, while Beelzebub was allowed a share in it also.

The wish of the scouts was that the large treasure of the outlaws could be found, and of which the leader would not tell, and they believed that if they kept right on there, they might be able to follow the trail to the hiding place.

This they decided to ask the chief to do, if he did not think a day or two of delay would make any great difference to the finding of the people of the Lost Valley.

CHAPTER VI.

BEELZEBUB'S STORY.

The dead outlaws were laid to rest in one grave, and then the scouts devoted themselves to cleaning their firearms, patching up bridles, and all else that needed it, and getting all ready for the start on the morrow.

A bath in the stream and the dressing of his wounds afterward greatly refreshed Beelzebub, and he said that he would be all right for the march on the morrow.

Lying on his blanket, while Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill sat near him, after dinner, and the others were lolling about, taking it easy, Beelzebub said:

"Massa Buffler Bill, yer ain't ask me nothin' about my leavin' ther camp whar yer left me."

"No, Beelzebub, I did not wish to worry you, and I thought you'd tell your story in good time."

"I did leave there, sah; but I tell yer now it wasn't 'cause I wanted to."

"From the company I found you in, I think not myself."

"I'll tell you all about it, sah, and I does know that as soon as I had got them things I were carryin' to whar them fellers had ther gold hid, they'd have kilt me sartin'."

"I do not doubt it."

The negro then told of how he had been surprised in camp, and all that had followed.

He said he was hoping that the chief of scouts would come along and save him, but he feared he would not arrive in time, for they were half starving him; he really was not able to carry the heavy load put upon him, and he was about used up when he had looked back and seen the scouts.

He could hardly believe his eyes, and he forgot all about his sufferings at once.

How they sought the refuge of the motte, bound and gagged him, and then of the awful resolve to die together, he made known, and added:

"Now, Massa Bill, I doesn't say I kin, and I guesses I cannot, but maybe I might find the gold, from what I heerd 'em talk about whar it was."

"How far was it from where we corralled them, Beelzebub?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"They said as how they'd git there that night, fer it were jist beyond the plain. Yer see, sah, as they intended killin' me, they didn't mind talking right out afore me."

"I see. But I would like to find the gold again, and we will make the try, unless you think your people of the Lost Valley may be in urgent need of our coming."

"Massa Bill, dey is mighty anxious, sah, fer you ter come, but I tells you, too, they is jist as safe as they kin be."

This was beyond the understanding of either Buf-

falo Bill or Pawnee Bill, and it flashed over the mind of the former that the negro might be mad.

He saw, too, that Pawnee Bill had the same thought, and he asked numberless questions of the black about the Lost Valley, to all of which the most vague answers were given, and which but served to complicate still more all that concerned the mysterious story told of the half hundred human beings who were lost and in need of help, yet were perfectly safe.

"We'll talk to the boys about going on and trying to find the outlaws' gold; for, with a treasure to discover, half a hundred people to find, and a lost valley to look up, we are getting mixed, Beelzebub." And Buffalo Bill walked off with Pawnee Bill.

"Well, Pawnee, what do you think of him?"

"He's a mystery, Cody."

"I guess he tells the truth about the people of the Lost Valley, only I wish he would tell us more than he does. And you heard him insist that we must go on foot; and, more, black ourselves up, and by so doing we can pass any Indians we may meet, simply going along as black scouts, uttering no word, showing no hostile act—in fact, appearing like black scouts of silence."

"Yes. I heard just what he said, and it is a novel undertaking. But on foot we will certainly leave no trail; we can each carry a pack for provisions, blankets, and ammunition, and certainly dodge Indians; when mounted we could not. I, for one, am in favor of the walking match."

"So am I; but I don't like this blacking-up busi-

ness, though I brought along the means to make us as black as Beelzebub is."

"We can call it our war paint, Cody, and go, as you said, as scouts of silence, black braves, ebony ghosts, or anything we choose to call ourselves—why, I rather like the idea of what promises to be a very remarkable expedition."

"And I also do, Pawnee," was Buffalo Bill's reply.

The scouts were all in favor of going on in search of the outlaws' gold.

So the next morning the start was made; the trail the outlaws had been following, their own, was found, and every man had his eyes open for the tracks of the men, for they were not easily found or followed.

Beelzebub was mounted upon the Indian pony, and said that he felt all right.

At noon the plain had been crossed and the trail entered the mountains.

There were the six tracks of the worn boots, the wearers then in their grave, and they led up a cañon, and Beelzebub said that the outlaws had found the gold far from its hiding place, but had brought it as far as they could and then buried it.

He further reported that they had hidden it in some break or crevice in a cliff.

Cliffs were found, crevices innumerable, but none with a fortune in gold in them.

The trail had been lost in the rock soil of a cañon, and the scouts were unable to find it again.

The sun went down and the scouts camped near where they believed was the hiding place of the gold,

and Beelzebub was questioned over and over again that night around the camp fire to tell all that he had heard the outlaws say.

The next day, with renewed hope, the search was kept up.

Noon came, but the treasure had not been found.

Night fell, but the gold was still resting securely in its hiding place.

"Boys, we must take the trail to-morrow to the Lost Valley," said the chief.

There was not a murmur of dissent.

But each scout photographed the surroundings of the suspected spot in his mind, for another try for the gold some day well in the future.

Beelzebub had been kept quiet, so he was in good condition again, and needed to be, for Buffalo Bill had told them that when they got to a certain point on the Wind River they would give up their horses, and continue on foot.

So the start was made, the chief in the lead, with the negro riding by his side, and keeping his eyes open to discover some scene he might remember to have passed in his wanderings from the Lost Valley.

At night the scouts camped in the Wind River Mountains, and here Buffalo Bill decided that it would be best to allow the two scouts to return with the horses to the rock fort, and even then they would have a long ride of it.

The packs were made, and Beelzebub insisted upon carrying the chief's as well as his own, but this Buffalo Bill would not allow him to do.

Farewells were said the next morning, and with sad hearts the two scouts who were to take the horses back, turned their faces southward.

Buffalo Bill and the others watched them go, and, casting his eyes over his men, the chief said:

"With you, Beelzebub, there are nine of us; we are afoot, and bound into the midst of an Indian country."

"Jist black up like niggers, Massa Bill, and de Injins ain't gwine ter hurt yer, sah; why, dey git when dey sees yer, sah."

Buffalo Bill smiled, and, looking over his group of daring men, said:

"Pards, we are now started upon a most mysterious and perilous trail. We are nine, all good men and true, as I happen to know. We could not be better armed; we have ample ammunition, plenty of provisions, and our rifles will get us game, our hooks and lines supply us with fish.

"I brought along the india-rubber boat one of the officers at the fort gave me, and it will carry across the streams our weapons and packs, for each one of us can swim. We are all good walkers, and have an extra supply of rawhide moccasins, and our boots.

"Beelzebub here has sought me to risk my life in a rescue I can learn from himself little about; but I have pledged my word to go with him, and I pledged you also to accompany me."

The men gave a cheer.

"Unfortunately, Beelzebub is lost—that is, he does not know how to find his way to the point he started

from, and we are, therefore, to find it for him. He wished us to go on foot, hence we are now dismounted; but, unlike some tribes of Indians, I do not believe that we lose our pluck with our horses.

"It is certainly safer to go through this country on foot; we can go where horses cannot, saving time and distance, and we have nothing to hamper us, no cattle to guard by night—only ourselves to look after.

"Another thing that Beelzebub wishes us to do is to black our faces."

The scouts all laughed.

"Whether he is right or wrong in it, he says that the Indians up in this country will not harm a negro. He saw a number of Indians on his long, lone trail, and they ran from him; and this particular tribe, he tells me, believe that black men are evil spirits, looking for bad Indians on earth, and they will neither fire on them nor go near them."

"The experiment is at least worth trying, Cody," said Pawnee Bill.

"It is, Pawnee, and we will try it, for it can do no other harm than to our complexions," was the chief's rejoinder, and the scouts all seemed greatly amused at the new rôle they were to appear in.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCOUTS OF SILENCE.

Each one of the scouts now took the corks, burned them in the camp fire, and began to put on their "black war paint."

They laughed heartily at each other when all were as sable as young pickaninnies, but Beelzebub did not see the joke.

As soon as the scouts were all ready for the march, packs were slung on their backs, and Buffalo Bill took the lead, with Beelzebub next to him, and Pawnee Bill bringing up the rear.

The Wind River was reached at noon, and, unrolling the rubber boat, which was some eight feet long by three in width, a light frame of sticks was made for it, the things put in, and, throwing off their clothes, the scouts plunged in and swam to the other bank.

The boat was easily towed after them, and as they all reached the other bank, Beelzebub said, with a broad grin:

"I guesses dere better not be no Injins around when yer has ter swim across a stream, or dey know fer sure yer was not nigger sperrits."

The scouts lost no time in putting on their clothes at this hint, for fear Indians might be around.

Then they went into camp on the river, to continue their tramp on the morrow, for they had made a fair march of it for the first day on foot.

"Pards, we go into ambush here."

The spot where Buffalo Bill had halted was a low ridge, over which ran a well-marked game trail.

This trail the scouts had been following since leaving the Wind River, and it led up the ridge, over it, and to an open valley beyond.

By taking position upon the ridge, they could readily command the trail as it came up the hill.

"I have an idea that we are being tracked, pards, and by delaying half a day here we can find out. It will be better to lose the time than be crept upon in our camp some night. We get a good chance here to see some miles behind us, and can hold this ridge against a large force if we are attacked. Let us wait and see."

The chief's mere suspicion was as much as most men's conviction, and the scouts were glad to halt and see what came of it.

The afternoon was about half gone, when Pawnee Bill, who was on watch, said quietly:

"They are coming, Cody."

"Indians?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"About three to one, if there are not more following than I see."

"Mounted?"

"Yes."

"We'll be ready for them."

"Massa Bill," said Beelzebub, coming to where the

chief was seated among the bowlders and pines on the summit of the ridge.

"Yes, Beelzebub."

"You kin shoot dem Injuns any time, sah."

"Well?"

"Jist try 'em first without shooting 'em, sah."

"How do you mean?"

"When dey comes up de hill, sah, you jist march down toward 'em with the gemmens, sah, and see if dey don't run like jack rabbits."

"I'll go you, Beelzebub; for, if they don't run at sight of us, we can encourage them to do so with our rifles."

Buffalo Bill called his men about him and told them of the plan of the black giant to stampede the coming Indians, and they all laughed at the idea, but were most willing to try it.

The redskins were now in plain view, about a mile distant, and coming along in Indian file.

They were counted and found to be thirty-seven in number; but, though four to one against the scouts, not a man felt the slightest trepidation.

"Now, pards," said Cody, "when they reach yonder large balsam, we'll show ourselves. They may fire upon us, but we must risk that. All ready!"

The Indians were not over a hundred yards away, and suddenly, in a line, the scouts of silence moved out of the pines, led by Beelzebub, and appeared before the mounted braves.

Buffalo Bill and his scouts then saw a remarkable thing happen. As the black giant strode along in ad-

vance of the scouts, the Indians gave a shout of terror, and broke into a wild rush for safety.

So silently had the scouts glided out of the pines, that the Indians had only discovered them by glancing up to the top of the ridge.

Then they had broken into a wild howl of half warning, half terror, and had wheeled their ponies.

Away went the band like a pack of hounds in full cry down the steep hill at the risk of breaking the necks of horses and riders.

Here a pony fell and hurled his rider far over his head.

The pony did not rise, but the brave kept along on hands and knees, bruised and bleeding, until he could spring to his feet and go limping on down the hill.

Another pony went down and rolled over his rider, and, though the pony got up, the redskin lay still until two of his comrades wheeled, and, dismounting, dragged him off.

The silent and blackened-faced scouts moved slowly on in line down the hill.

Not a word was uttered by them, and not a rifle or arrow was fired at them by the Indians.

Scurrying like deer to the nearest shelter, the redskins sped on, and the scouts kept up their march to the plain.

Then they wheeled into single file, and, retracing their way up the ridge, descended to the valley beyond, where a good camping place was found.

They slept more serenely that night than they had yet done, and were on the march when the sun rose,

Buffalo Bill still leading the way and pushing in a direction that must bring him, he felt assured, to the Bighorn River.

They marched along with lighter step, and when the halt was made at noon, the nature of the country was becoming such that Buffalo Bill ordered boots off and to be replaced by rawhide moccasins.

The mountain could be more readily climbed with the lighter and more yielding footgear, and then the latter would leave no trails to speak of.

"I think we can get over this range in front of us by nightfall, and I feel pretty sure the Bighorn River is beyond," said the chief as they once more resumed their way.

Beelzebub had now become himself again, and went up the mountain at a pace that even the roughened sinews of the scouts could not stand, and he got well ahead of them in the long, hard climb.

But suddenly Buffalo Bill, who was nearest to him, and a few hundred yards behind, saw him enter a pine thicket, and at the same time all saw a number of Indians fleeing for life—all evidently frightened at the appearance of the supposed black men.

"Beelzebub has made a discovery," Cody called back to Pawnee Bill.

They all advanced and found, lying in the pine thicket, a prisoner.

It was a white man.

He was securely bound, painfully so, and Beelzebub was kneeling by his side, unfastening the thongs that

were about his hands and feet, and which were much swollen and inflamed.

But a glad cry broke from the lips of Buffalo Bill as he advanced toward the prisoner.

It was Doc Miner, the gold-boomer captain.

"Ah, Miner, I am glad, indeed, to see you, and I have found it hard to believe you dead," said the chief.

"Only half dead, Mr. Cody; but you have saved me."

"And glad we are, for we deeply deplored not having been able to do so before."

"You scared the Indians and they ran off and left me."

"Pards," said Cody, "this is the man who proved my friend, the gold-boomer captain, Doc Miner, as I have told you."

The men pressed about him and grasped his swollen hands, which Beelzebub had released. Turning to the negro, Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, Beelzebub, you have kept your word and frightened the redskins into fits, so I know now surely that there is virtue in what you have asserted about black spirits being a terror to the Indians of this Big Horn country."

Leaving no trail with their rawhide shoes, the scouts soon after that turned their steps toward the base of the mountains and went along the range, Doc Miner going with them.

Mile after mile they held on, seeming to be tireless.

At last a stream was come to, flowing out of a cañon; a march of fully a dozen miles had been made, and in a secure spot Buffalo Bill encamped his men.

The next morning, as not an Indian had been seen, all of the scouts shouldered their loads, and the party took up the march.

Another night camp and Buffalo Bill knew that they had gotten well up toward the Big Horn Mountains, and if the people of the Lost Valley really existed, save in the imagination of Beelzebub, the black giant, they could not be so very far from where the camp then was.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEARING THE LOST VALLEY.

Still another day and another went by, and each night camp brought the scouts farther and farther into a most beautiful country, yet one that thus far had been most fatal to all palefaces venturing there, lured to risk life and untold hardships and suffering in search of the yellow dross that buys men so readily, soul and body.

Noon the next day brought them to a perfect garden spot in the Big Horn Mountains.

They would halt there, for the men needed the rest, and Buffalo Bill and Beelzebub would take short searches to try to find the Lost Valley and its mysterious people.

The spot selected for the camp was all that could be wished.

Wikiups were built as a shelter, for the cold nights were coming on, and the men made themselves most comfortable right near a large spring.

Leaves furnished good mattresses to spread the blankets upon, the provisions were plentiful, and very little use had been made of the ammunition since the fight with the Six Satans, save to kill game.

As there was no game near the spring, it was decided to send several scouts on a hunt the next day to get deer, miles away, and in the streams the fish were plentiful.

The scouts still kept their faces and hands blacked well with burned cork; for they had realized the virtue of being blacked up in that country, and Doc Miner had transformed himself also, in appearance at least, into a negro.

Without a guard, the scouts lay down to sleep, and nothing disturbed their slumbers.

The next morning Pawnee Bill took a party hunting up the valley with him, and Buffalo Bill and Beelzebub began their first real search for the Lost Valley.

The hunters were gone all day, and when they returned to the camp at sunset, they carried very heavy loads of various kinds of game.

But Doc Miner and the two scouts who remained in the camp with him could give no reply as to what had become of Buffalo Bill and the negro.

They had not put in an appearance, and it was certainly thought that they should have done so.

"Were it any one else than the chief, I would be anxious," said Pawnee Bill hopefully; but all could see that he was anxious, even though it was the chief.

The scouts awaited supper for some time, and then ate it, as the chief and the negro did not return.

The meal was, however, not enjoyed by any one. Bedtime came; and yet what could be done? No one could go out at night to look for the missing chief and the negro.

If nothing had happened, then Buffalo Bill would find the way to the camp. All knew that the scout had gone fully prepared to spend the night anywhere he might be overtaken.

A search of the traps of the negro showed that he had gone also prepared for a stay, if necessary.

At last the scouts decided to retire, and Pawnee Bill put the best face on the nonreturn of the chief by saying that they had doubtless gone so far, made some discovery, and, to carry out their intention, had decided to camp where they were for the night, to be on the spot early in the morning, rather than return to camp.

Dawn came, but the chief and the negro had not returned. One of those who appeared to be most anxious about the chief was Doc Miner. He wanted to go on the search, but this Pawnee Bill would not hear of.

"We will all go, and divide in twos, save myself, and if we cannot find their trail, we will go the way we think they must have gone. You take care of the camp, Doc, and each one of us, as he gives up the search, will come in; only I do not wish any man to give up until he is certain that he cannot find the chief, and must get back here by night. Now, pard, let us be off."

Such was Pawnee Bill's order to his comrades, and they all started on their search.

And in the lone camp Doc Miner remained by himself, watching them as they disappeared on different trails, and musing to himself in a very determined way.

"Buffalo Bill must be found, dead or alive; and, if dead, he shall be avenged!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNSEEN ENEMY.

When Buffalo Bill and Beelzebub left the camp, the chief went down the valley leading from the Big Horn Mountains, where the camp had been located, hoping to pass some scene that the negro would recall at sight.

Could he do this, Buffalo Bill felt little doubt but that they could in that way find the Lost Valley, for the scout had perfect faith that the negro was sincere in all that he had said, and that it was not the creation of a mind diseased.

Brave as he was, good plainsman also, it could be readily understood by Buffalo Bill how the negro failed to find a given locality when he had been guided thither by some one else, and had simply left there to endeavor to find his way to a place where he could get word of him, the chief of scouts, who was to be secretly urged to come to the rescue of people in distress.

Why some one else—the guide of the party, for instance—had not been sent on this mission, Buffalo Bill had been unable to find out from Beelzebub, who would tell nothing more than he had made up his mind could, or should, be told.

Starting out alone with Beelzebub, and having arrived, as it were, almost upon the scene to which the negro had wished to bring him, Buffalo Bill thought

that, perhaps, he would tell him more than he thus far had done, and to encourage him to do so, he had said:

"Well, Beelzebub, you think we are near the scene of the Lost Valley?"

"Sure, sah; very sartin."

"What do you tell by?"

"Well, sah, dere is trees and mountains and valleys dat looks familiarlike, though I can't jist place 'em; but I is sartin I has seen 'em before."

"Did you ever go far from the valley?"

"Not very, sah; but I hunted 'round, maybe ten and a dozen miles away."

"Suppose you find some spot that you recall thoroughly, will you go right to the valley?"

"Well, Massa Bill, I'll go as near as I kin, and then let you decide what is ter be done."

"All right; keep your eyes open, and see if you can find any place you remember to have been in before."

"Yes, sah; I'm a-lookin' hard, sah."

They went on for some miles, and the valley they were following opened into a larger one.

As they came out into the larger valley, Beelzebub halted suddenly, rubbed his eyes, looked about him, and said earnestly:

"Massa Buffler Bill, I knows whar I is."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sah; you has found me."

"Found you?"

"Yes, sah; for, if yer finds me, then I knows whar I is."

"I don't just grasp your meaning, Beelzebub."

"I have been in dis valley before, sah."

"Ah!"

"I has kilt game here, sah."

"Then you think you recognize where you are?"

"I knows it, sah."

"You believe you can find your way from here to the Lost Valley?"

"I kin, sah."

"What do you recognize about this valley?"

"If I is right, sah, you see dem cliffs way yonder?"

"Yes."

"Dem is over de cañon where dey used ter git gold."

"The people of the Lost Valley?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where are they now?"

"In de Lost Valley, sah."

"Can you go there from here?"

"If dem cliffs yonder is over de gold cañon, I kin, sah."

"Shall we go to the cliffs?"

"Yes, sah."

"They are some miles from here."

"I knows dat, sah, but right along."

The negro started off down the valley in a way that told the scout that he was in earnest, that he had certainly "found himself"—or, that is, gotten his bearings from some familiar scene before him.

He kept up a rapid pace, Buffalo Bill keeping close by his side.

The cliffs loomed up nearer and nearer, and at last

the scout and the negro were almost under their shadow.

"Massa Bill?"

"Well, Beelzebub."

"You see dat break yonder in de cliffs?"

"Yes."

"It is a cañon, sah."

"Well."

"It runs back from where you see de open place, sah, and dere big spring yonder dat flow down de cañon, and dere is whar dey found de gold."

"The gold boomers?"

"Yes, sah."

"Then they are there now?"

"No, sah; dey ain't."

"Why not?"

"Dey in de Lost Valley."

"Do you know how to get there from here?"

"Yes, sah; but you jist wait right here until I go up to de break in de cliff and take a peep in fust."

"All right; go ahead, and I'll wait here, Beelzebub."

The negro went forward alone, began to climb up the steep rocks to the break in the cliff, and, watching him, Buffalo Bill saw him peep cautiously over, as though he expected to see an enemy beyond.

A moment he remained thus, and then came a distant report of a rifle that echoed and reechoed among the cliffs, and Buffalo Bill saw the negro sink down upon his face as though dead.

Buffalo Bill was fairly startled at what he beheld.

He had not thought of danger there to himself or the negro.

The shot had come so unexpectedly, that for a moment he did not know where to look for an enemy.

It appeared to have ended the life of Beelzebub, for he had fallen in a heap and lay limp and motionless, like a dead man.

But the scout was not one to hesitate long when action was needed, or to allow a crime to go unpunished when he could bring the perpetrator to book.

Thoughts went like lightning through his mind.

He thought of the people of Lost Valley that the negro had risked so much to rescue. Could they have killed their rescuer?

How far was the Lost Valley from where he then was?

Of course, it must be those from the valley who had fired on the black giant.

But who they were he must know, and where they were, as well as why that murderous shot had been sent at a rescuer.

Bounding forward, the scout reached a large rock at the base of the cliff.

As he did so, a man sprang in view through the break of the cliff, and within a few feet of the form of the negro.

He was a large man, heavily bearded, long-haired, and he held a rifle in his hand.

With a wave of his hand to some one unseen, he called out:

"Come, Tom; for I told you I was right. It's ther giant nigger of the Lost Valley."

Buffalo Bill heard a voice answer afar off, but did not catch what was said; yet he heard the reply of the man in full view of him, for he replied to the other:

"Yes, dead as ther devil. I chipped him atween ther eyes. Come along, and we'll plant him."

The scout remained behind the boulder.

He could afford to wait; for he knew that another enemy was near, and would soon be in sight.

The one in sight had fired on the negro, knowing who he was from his words, and being anxious to kill him.

He had spoken, too, of the Lost Valley; so he must know where it was.

His words told the scout that Beelzebub was dead, and in the very moment of his success in bringing him to the rescue of people who, if these two were a specimen of them, did not deserve rescue.

To "plant" the body of Beelzebub, and which the scout understood to mean to bury him, he knew could not be done there in the rocks. They must bring it to the valley where the earth was soft.

To do this they must come down within a few paces of the boulder behind which Buffalo Bill was hiding.

"I think I've got the best of this, and that Beelzebub will be avenged," muttered Buffalo Bill, and, slinging his rifle at his back, he drew a revolver in each hand.

"Ho, Rocks, yer got him," Buffalo Bill heard; yet

he dared not look toward the speaker for fear of being seen.

"It's ther nigger, ain't it?" asked the man who had fired the shot.

"Sure."

"How'd he git out?"

"Who knows; fer I thought he'd give up trying long ago."

"He didn't though, if he's here."

"No, he didn't; but there can't be more of 'em out."

"You bet ther ain't, and they won't be no more; so we've got it our way, sure."

"We has ef our two pards comes back all right."

"They'll git here, fer gold will fetch 'em, you bet."

"Then we'll be rich for our nat'ral lives."

"We will, and hev something ter leave after death. We played to win, and we got ther game; only I don't like this nigger getting out."

"Me nuther."

"More might."

"Not ef they come ther way he did; for thar ain't more men kin do it that I'm acquainted with."

"Nor me; but I wishes our two pards would git back with the horses, for it's after time some weeks, and provisions is running low."

"Yes, and gold won't buy food in this country."

"No; all we has got won't git us a meal if we was starving."

"That's so; but suppose we keep a eye on ther valley, for if we sees more of 'em gittin' out, it means death ter us, if we don't fust kill them."

"It does; but we'll do ther killin', as has just been done in this case of ther nigger; but let's drag him down inter ther soft ground there, go through his pockets, and see what he's wuth to us outside of the killin', and then he kin be left for coyotes ter chaw on, fer it's too much like work ter plant him."

With this, the two men took hold of the negro, and their oaths revealed to Buffalo Bill that they were dragging him along down the steep hillside, and found it no easy task.

Nearer and nearer they came, and the scout moved to the side of the rock nearest to which they must pass.

A moment more and they came within ten feet of him, and would have come full upon him, when suddenly they were confronted by a tall form and heard the words:

"Hands up, both of you!"

CHAPTER X.

AT THE REVOLVER'S MUZZLE.

The sudden appearance of the chief of the scouts of silence before them, appearing like an apparition to the two men, who had no thought of danger near, caused them to cry out in mingled terror and utter surprise.

The form of the negro, which they were half bearing, half dragging along, was dropped with a suddenness that was by no means showing a proper respect for the dead.

There the two men stood, and before them towered the tall, athletic form of Buffalo Bill.

He held a revolver in each hand, and was ten feet from them.

"Hands up, I said!"

The men had not heeded the first command, perhaps from utter helplessness in their amazement to obey. Now they did heed, and quickly.

Buffalo Bill stepped toward the one nearest him, unbuckled his belt, thus disarming him of his knife and revolver, and then drew the strap of his rifle over his head.

"Now, your turn, sir!"

The man did not move.

"Step here, quick, or I'll reach you with a bullet."

The scout saw that the men had discovered that they were two to one, and were plotting resistance.

At the Revolver's Muzzle.

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But the hint of reaching for him with a bullet brought the man quickly to within the length of the scout's arm.

He, too, was disarmed of his belt of weapons and his rifle.

"Now I wish to tie you, and if I see the first show of funny business, you will hand in your chips."

The men made no resistance, but they were glancing toward each other furtively, and certainly were plotting to escape.

"Lie flat on your faces, both of you, and put your hands behind your back!" came the order.

"I'll tie 'em, Massa Buffler Bill."

The words fairly startled the scout, with all his iron nerve. It was as though a dead man was speaking to him.

The two men uttered a yell of fright, and for a moment seemed about to risk bullets in the face of superstitious fear.

Had it been nighttime, the added dread that darkness brings to the superstitious would have sent them away on the jump.

"Why, Beelzebub, I thought that you were dead, and, thank Heaven, it is not so," said Buffalo Bill earnestly.

"No, massa; it were a close call, for dat bullet done cut clean inter my head, and I guesses will kill me yet. I is awful dizzy in my head, like, but I kin tie dese gemmens, all right."

With this the negro passed his hand across his head, took his lariat from over his shoulder, and be-

gan to tie the two men, Buffalo Bill keeping them covered with his revolver, and aiding in binding them securely.

"The one lariat will do for them both, and keep them tied together, Beelzebub—there, now we have them; but can you not stand up?"

"It don't seem as though I could, sir," and the black kept sitting on the ground.

"I'll see to your wound right off."

With this the scout placed the weapons on the ground, wheeled the prisoners face to face, and bound them thus with his own lariat.

"Now, Beelzebub;" and he began to examine the wound.

It was in the center of the forehead; but, having been fired upward, the bullet had glanced on the frontal bone, cut along under the scalp for several inches, and then made its way out, leaving the two wounds, but neither serious, though the shock of the blow had felled the black and rendered him unconscious for some minutes.

Bathing the wound with water from his canteen, and binding it up with a bandage moistened with arnica, which the great scout always carried with him, the scout said:

"You are all right, Beelzebub, and the dizzy feeling will soon wear off."

"It don't hurt, sah; but it do feel as though a mule hed kicked me."

"Rest is what you want, and we'll go to the camp of these two gentlemen, for it cannot be far away."

The men had stood watching the every movement of the scout, and talking in whispers to each other.

"We ain't got no camp," said one.

"See here, men. You sought to kill this negro pard of mine, and that he escaped death is a marvel. I heard all that you said, and I know that you have a camp here, for you came from the camp of those who settled in this basin."

"That's so, Massa Bill, fer I knows 'em both, one being named Tom Vail and t'other they calls Rocks. Dey had two pards, and we all thought dey got kilt de day of de 'arthquake. I knows 'em, sah; but why dey want ter kill me I doesn't know, fer I never did 'em no harm, and den I thought dey was dead, and felt sorry for 'em; but dere must be two more of 'em, sah; so look out, Massa Bill."

"Yes, there are two more of them, though they are not here just now, but are due. I know a little about these fellows myself, Beelzebub, for they gave themselves away when they thought they had killed you. Come, lead the way to your camp, or I'll find a way to make you, and which you will not like."

The scout had unwound his lariat, so that they could walk side by side, and the two men saw that there was no nonsense to be put up with on their part; so one said:

"We has a leetle camp down the vally, if you want to go there."

"Lead the way. Beelzebub, I'll help you," and, supporting the negro with his arm, Buffalo Bill followed on behind the two men as they shuffled along down

the valley, the weapons of each man being hung about his neck so that the victors would not have to carry them.

The two prisoners walked slowly, partly because their legs were tied so as to prevent rapid traveling, and also because they did not wish to go.

They were livid with rage and fear, with hate and anxiety, for they did not know what would be their fate, while they saw their hopes dashed to earth in a second of time.

Down the valley they went for a mile, perhaps, the walk seeming to benefit the giant negro, and at last they turned into a small cañon in which grew a grove of pines, and at the head of which was a spring.

"De cañon whar de people hunt fer gold am not far from here, Massa Bill," said the negro, and then he added: "I jist guesses dat's what dese men is here for while t'others is in de Lost Valley, for something has been de matter, sartin."

The camp now came into view, a stoutly built log cabin, with door and shutters of hewn timber, and a shed along the front.

It was near the spring, was sheltered by the overhanging cliffs and the pines, and, winter or summer, was a safe and comfortable retreat.

"De people built de cabin, Massa Bill; put it up for dere provisions, which dey kept here, ter keep from going back to de valley, sah, every night, and dey only all went on Sundays."

"And where are these people now, Beelzebub?"

"In de Lost Valley."

"Do they allow these two men to remain here alone?"

"Dey can't help it, sah," was the mystifying rejoinder of the negro, and Buffalo Bill muttered:

"Well, of all mysteries that I ever trailed, this one of the people of the Lost Valley is the deepest. So you did find your camp, eh?" said Buffalo Bill to the two men, and he made them fast to a tree, back to back.

Then he spread the negro's blanket for him upon the pine straw, and said:

"Now, Beelzebub, you lie down there, while I reconnoiter this camp, which is a very snug affair, I see."

The two prisoners muttered oaths; the black lay down at full length, and Buffalo Bill threw open the cabin door and shutters, which gave light within.

It was a large cabin, and there were a number of bunks in it along the rear wall.

There were shelves, too, with provisions, and a table, cooking utensils, weapons and picks, shovels, axes, and hatchets.

A haunch of venison hung under the shed outside, with bacon, hams, and dried fish, showing that the men were still well supplied with provisions.

In a plot of ground back of the cabin, there were potatoes, cabbages, and turnips growing, and places to store them away for the winter.

"You fellows have had the best, I see, and I am going to know about you before I am done with you," said Buffalo Bill.

Then he added that he would cook dinner for all

hands, and draw on the cabin's larder for his supplies.

A fire was smoldering outside of the cabin, and this was replenished, and soon a dinner of roast potatoes, bacon, venison, hoeecake, and coffee was prepared.

Beelzebub was asleep; but woke at the scout's call, saying that he felt much better, save for a headache.

"It is well it is no worse, Beelzebub. Now, see what a good dinner we have; or, I may say, supper, for it is getting late. I guess we'll camp here to-night and return to our camp to-morrow; or I will go and bring the boys here, for you must keep quiet for a few days."

CHAPTER XI.

PREPARING A WELCOME.

Buffalo Bill would have liked to have returned to his own camp that night, but he saw that Beelzebub was still somewhat dazed by the wound in his head, and he did not just know how it would turn out.

The scout had seen similar wounds prove fatal when least expected, and if the negro was left to guard the two prisoners, he might lapse into unconsciousness, and there might be a possibility of the men getting free.

Then, too, he knew what had been said by the two men of the parads they were expecting.

They were overdue, and might never come; and yet, again, if they did happen to come that very night, it would mean sure death to Beelzebub should he be left there alone.

So the scout decided to remain, and after the meal was over, he secured the prisoners, left Beelzebub in charge, and started out to reconnoiter.

He was not long in finding a trail leading into a wild cañon, through which flowed a stream like a river in wet weather, but at other times was dry.

Going down this, the scout saw that he had struck the gold beds of the people of the Lost Valley.

It was a case of placer mining, the wash from the mountains of the particles of gold, and yet the pick and shovel had been brought into use also in the bed of the cañon.

"They have gotten considerable gold out of here, that is certain, and these men have been steadily at work, I see; but where are the people of the Lost Valley, for only these two murderous scamps seem to be anywhere about."

So musing, Buffalo Bill went on through the cañon, came out into a large valley, and, climbing to the top of a lofty cliff, looked about, glass in hand.

It was nearly sunset; and the rays of light were cast far down the valley, and the eyes of the scout fell upon moving objects there. At once he turned his glass upon them.

"They are horsemen!" he cried. "And they are coming this way."

A moment after, he continued:

"There are two of them, but they are leading five horses. By Jove! I believe they are the pards of these two murderers, just returning. How lucky I did not return to my camp. Yes, they must be their two comrades; and, if these men are murderers, then those coming can be no better.

"They are all of half a dozen miles away, and it will be an hour and a half before they can reach the cabin, and darkness will be in soon. I'll go and prepare for them."

The scout took another long look at the far-distant horsemen, then descended from the cliff, walked rapidly back through the gold cañon, and reached the cabin just as dusk fell.

"Men, I am sorry to have to gag you, and make you more secure, but I am determined to be upon the

safe side. Are you well enough, Beelzebub, to help me?"

"Oh, yes, sah."

"Then get two sticks, put a piece of blanket over the head of each, and have it so you can tie it back of their heads."

"Lordy, Massa Bill, but don't yer think I knows how ter fix a gag in ther mouth, after what I hev hed done ter me in ther same way?"

"Yes; I remember you did suffer that way at the hands of Snaky Sam and his desperadoes. I will tie these men in their bunks, when they have been gagged, and they will give us no trouble or anxiety."

"It will kill us!" shouted Rocks.

"Oh, no; you don't die so easily."

The two men, bound as they were, sought to resist, but they soon found that they were as children in the hands of the scout, and they were placed in their bunks, made fast there, and the gags put in their mouths so that they could utter no sound.

To test this, the scout gave each one a severe pinch, to make them cry out, but a low groan was all that they could utter.

"You see, Beelzebub, I discovered some visitors coming, and who, I am sure, are the pards of these two men coming for them; so we wish no outcries of alarm, for I shall capture them also."

The two men could hear, if they could not talk, and they writhed and moaned at what they heard.

"You, Beelzebub, hide in the pines, rifle in hand,

and be ready to drop those men if they attempt to run away."

"Yes, sah; I'll do it."

"Hide a short distance off in the pines. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, sah."

"All right. I'll wait in the cabin to welcome them."

The negro shouldered his rifle and walked to a place of hiding, with the scout by his side.

Then Buffalo Bill returned to the cabin and closed the door, to await the arrival of the visitors.

CHAPTER XII.

TAKEN IN MOST CLEVERLY.

That the chief of scouts had made no mistake in his surmise as to who the two horsemen were was proven by the sound of hoofs coming up the cañon.

Beelzebub saw by the moonlight two men, with five led horses, two carrying packs, pass by him. He heard one say:

"I'll be sartin afore I make a break, for we don't know what has happened in ther three months we has been away."

"All right; I'll wait here," was the answer.

The first speaker then rode on alone to the cabin and called out:

"Ho, pards, kin yer give a couple of friends lodgin' fer ther night?"

The two prisoners writhed in agony of spirit, but Buffalo Bill, imitating the voice of Rocks, and having learned the names of the two men from Beelzebub, called out:

"Hooray! Is that you, Jim Sims and Alex Sands?"

"It are. Any one with you?"

"Yes; two pards is here. Wait until I open the door, and you bet we is glad ter see yer, fer Tom is laid up just now and feelin' mighty bad."

"Hoop-la! Come on, Alex!" cried Jim Sims, in a joyful tone. "They is here, and all's O. K., with the goose hanging high."

The tone was exultant, and Jim Sims leaped from his horse, stepped to the door, and was suddenly seized by the throat with a grip of iron, hurled to the dirt floor, and heard the words:

"Utter a sound of warning to your pard and you are a dead man, Jim Sims!"

The man was silent with fright, and in an instant the lariat of Buffalo Bill had been passed around and around his arms, pinioning them to his body, while his weapons had been removed.

"Come in, Alex, and see poor Tom," said Buffalo Bill; and the other man, having dismounted, stepped into the cabin, to be felled his full length by a stunning blow dealt him by Buffalo Bill full in the face.

"Ho, Beelzebub!" called out the scout, and the negro sprang into the cabin at the call, having followed the last man closely.

The latter found himself bound before he recovered from the scout's stunning blow full in the face, but he gasped:

"Who is yer, cuss yer?"

"A government officer on the track of gold boomers, four of whom we have just roped in, for there lie your pards, Tom and Rocks, in as bad a way as you are. Is this one all secure, Beelzebub?"

"You bet he is, Massa Buffler Bill."

"Buffalo Bill! That means we hang, Jim Sims!" cried Alex Sands, in bitter tones.

"So you are Buffalo Bill, is yer?" asked Jim Sims.

"Yes; anything else I can do for you?" and the

scout naturally felt elated over his successful capture without firing a shot or having to take a life.

"No, cuss yer, yer hev done too much."

"We'll take the gags out of those fellows' mouths now, Beelzebub, as we have these two secure." And, going over to the bunks, the two gags were removed, water was handed the men, and the four were at liberty to talk together, as soon as all four were secured in bunks for the night.

Then Buffalo Bill and the negro went out to care for the horses, and a good grassplot was found down the cañon, where the animals were staked out.

The two packsaddles were well filled with supplies, and two of the other horses had bridles and saddles on them for the use of the men who were to ride them back to civilization when the gold boomers returned with their riches.

From the conversation of the four men, Buffalo Bill soon gleaned that the two men had had a hard time of it going through on foot, but had reached Helena at last, and, after a long rest, had bought horses and supplies, and had started back again for the Big Horn Basin for their pards, and, cheered by the riches they would become possessors of and were going to bring back with them to civilization.

The firelight showed Buffalo Bill that the two men had hard faces, about on a par with his first two prisoners, and he knew that it would not do to leave them alone, bound as they were, with Beelzebub, until the negro felt wholly himself again, and so he said:

"Now, we will turn in, Black Pard, and get a good

night's rest, and to-morrow I'll go after the boys and bring them over here, for this seems to be about the end of our trail."

"It is, Massa Bill, and when I feels better in de morn'ing, I show you something, and tell you something, too, for I guesses now is about de time ter do more talkin' den I has done."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, but he was glad to feel that at last the silence of the negro was to be broken; the mystery of the Lost Valley and its people solved.

Throwing more wood upon the fire, and spreading his blanket, he turned in also, and only the crackling of the fire disturbed the silence of the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECRET DISCOVERED.

When morning dawned, the scout and the giant black were on their feet.

The latter said that he was all right, only his head was sore and felt twice as heavy as usual.

The prisoners were taken out of the bunks in the cabin and tied to trees near the outside fire, where breakfast was put on by the negro, while the scout went to lead the horses to water and to change them to a fresh grazing ground.

This was accomplished by the time Beelzebub had breakfast done, and as the chief came up, he found the prisoners talking earnestly with the black, who called out:

"Massa Bill, what you think dese bad gemmens want me to do just now?"

"Kill me, I suppose, and set them free."

"Lordy, Massa Bill, you read minds same as you does a book."

"It does not require much mind reading, Beelzebub, to know that they offered you big money to turn against me."

"That's just what they did do, sah; offer to give me half de gold dey have got to set 'em free and let dem kill you."

"They didn't know you, Black Pard. But I don't

blame them, for killing is their trade, and they naturally wish to go free. Come, men, and we'll have breakfast," said the scout, with no show of resentment toward his prisoners.

The meal over with, Buffalo Bill decided to start at once for the scouts' camp, leaving Beelzebub to guard the four prisoners, who were greatly downcast at their failure to bribe the negro to allow them to go free, and which they could only do by putting the chief out of the way.

They had, indeed, offered him half the gold that they had, and said he could accompany them on their way.

That Beelzebub would prove false to him, Buffalo Bill did not for a moment believe, and he called him aside and said:

"Last night I would not leave you alone with those fellows, Black Pard, for I was not just sure how that head of yours would pan out after that wound, and feared they might best you. But now you are all right, and I will go to our camp after the boys."

"You keep your eyes upon these men, for they are as tricky as snakes; and, bound as they are, they are four, you one, and they may find some way of getting the best of you, should you be off your guard for a moment."

"I ain't goin' to be, sah, for I is de man ter stay right here and watch dem."

"I believe that, and their offering you gold amounts to nothing, for they would be traitors to you the moment you help them."

"I believe you, sah; I does, indeed. But you'll find 'em here when you gits back ag'in, and den we has a little talk, for I guesses de time hab come for it, sah."

Buffalo Bill said nothing to this. He felt that circumstances had so shaped themselves that at last he was to discover what secret there was hanging over the Lost Valley.

So he shouldered his rifle and started off for the scouts' camp. As he went by the break in the cliff where Beelzebub had so nearly lost his life the evening before, he climbed up the rocks to the chasm out of which the two gold boomers had appeared.

He saw a cañon that was wonderfully wild and rugged, running through a range that towered high on either side.

The cliffs were lofty, the pass very narrow, and it sloped downward, and appeared to end abruptly, yet through the vista the scout looked far beyond to another vast range, and over a valley that lay several thousand feet below him.

Not wishing to take the rugged way then down the cañon, to have a look at the country beyond the opening, Buffalo Bill returned to the smaller valley he had been passing through, and continued on his way.

He had not gone very far before he saw two men approaching. At a glance he recognized Pawnee Bill and Lasso Larry.

They saw him about the same time, and gave a shout of joy.

"We are after you, chief, for, as you did not put in an appearance last night, we got anxious."

"Where's the black giant?" called out Pawnee Bill.

"Safe, but by a miracle only, for he got a wound that was a very close call."

"Fell on the rocks, I suppose, sir."

"No, he was shot."

Then Buffalo Bill told of the discovery so far made, and the capture of the four gold boomers; and, learning that the scouts were scattered in search of him, he said:

"Lasso Larry, you return and bring the outfit here, for I will have some one down the valley to meet you. If the boys do not come in until night, come to-morrow, and Pawnee Bill will go with me now, and see if we cannot make further discoveries."

Lasso Larry at once set off on the return trail, and Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill went back down the valley.

As the break in the cliff was reached, Buffalo Bill led the way up the steep hillside, and the two continued on through the narrow pass.

Buffalo Bill had an idea that he would make some discovery by going through that pass that severed the range.

As they drew near the farther end, they could see through the opening that a large valley lay far below them, a thousand or more feet.

The pass had narrowed to less than a hundred feet, and arose in solid walls of rock far above them.

When within a short distance of the end, Buffalo Bill halted suddenly and cried:

"See there, Pawnee!"

"Why, it looks as though this end of the pass had been blasted out with powder."

"That is just what it was, Pawnee, and—we have found it—see! The Lost Valley lies before us!" and Buffalo Bill's voice rang like a trumpet through the pass.

Pawnee Bill fairly started at the ringing words of Buffalo Bill.

The chief of scouts, since his meeting with the black giant, almost used up by starvation and wounds, had had his eyes upon the Lost Valley in the Big Horn Mountains.

He had given his pledge to the negro to answer the call upon him for aid, to go with him on what to other men would have seemed an aimless trail.

He had pushed on against all dangers, all obstacles, and his intent was to triumph.

With very little to work upon, a mystery to solve, he had at last found the El Dorado. There before him was the Lost Valley.

The two scouts stood gazing through the pass down upon the valley, for it lay far below them.

It was no wonder that a triumphant smile hovered about the mouth of Buffalo Bill and his dark eyes glowed with joy.

He had come to the end of the long and perilous trail. The situation was a striking one to both men.

Where they stood, beneath their feet, and all around them, the rocks were blackened with powder.

There had been a heavy blast there, as they could see. And that blast of powder had shattered the cliff, and hurled a small mountain of rock down into the valley far below.

It had broken off the edge of the cliff right at the end of the pass most abruptly.

Right beneath their feet the cliff broke off and went downward almost like an artificial wall for a thousand feet or more.

The two scouts advanced to the edge, and their eyes became riveted in wonder at what they beheld.

Below them was a valley, or rather a basin, for it was surrounded on every side by towering cliffs. No break could be seen anywhere, no cañon pushing into the surrounding walls of rock.

It was not a valley surrounded by mountain ranges, but a valley completely encircled by cliffs rising from one thousand to three thousand feet.

If they had a break in them, an inlet, an outlet, the glass of Buffalo Bill failed to reveal that fact.

It was a perfect marvel of nature.

A valley that seemed to have sunk downward and downward into the earth.

But that was not all, for right in its center was a large lake, with wooded shores.

The valley was a couple of miles in diameter at least.

It was undulating, well timbered with trees, large

and small, of various kinds, and it was a perfect garden spot of beauty. And more, it was inhabited.

That was what the two scouts stood so intently observing.

Around the lake, in the timber, were scattered a score of cabins. Behind each cabin was a well-tilled garden spot, fenced in, and off on the meadowlands at one end of the valley were visible a large herd of cattle, while there were horses and mules there, too, considerably over a hundred in number.

A group of a score or more wagons were in one place, sheltered by boards, and a smoke over in the timber was soon made out to be a small sawmill at work.

There was one cabin larger than the others, that appeared to be a storehouse; another was a church, for it had a steeple, and the ring of a blacksmith's hammer came from a shop on the edge of the lake.

Men were in the gardens at work; others were over in the heavy timber, and women and children were also visible.

The crowing of a rooster was heard down in the valley, and a flock of sheep was feeding right beneath the cliff on which the scouts were standing.

For a long time did Buffalo Bill gaze through his field glass at the strange sight, and then, without a word, handed it to Pawnee Bill.

He, too, looked long and attentively, and when he removed the glass from his eyes, Buffalo Bill said:

"We have found the Lost Valley."

"Yes, indeed."

"What a beautiful picture it is."

"Beautiful, indeed. The negro told the truth, Pawnee."

"He certainly did, but why did he not tell sooner?"

"That remains to be seen, and there is some mystery about his not doing so."

"How to get down there is the question."

"There must be some way, though it is certainly not from this side."

"That is evident, but Beelzebub will know."

"It is to be hoped so, but it looks to me like a perfect bowl into which you must tumble to get there."

"So it does."

After a close search of the cliff all around through the glass, Buffalo Bill said:

"I can discover no break anywhere in the walls."

"What do you think was the cause of blasting this cliff to pieces with powder, Cody?"

"I cannot see through it, but Beelzebub must know, and we'll go and hunt him up, for there is no need of our remaining at the camp where I left him and the prisoners with that valley at hand."

"No, we will go there."

"And must start those people out pretty soon, for it will be slow traveling with a wagon train, and we must not be caught on the way. Come, we will go after Beelzebub."

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE STORY.

Pawnee Bill looked with interest as he approached the cabin in the cañon with Buffalo Bill.

Beelzebub, revolver in hand, lay on the pine straw, guarding his prisoners, who were tied to trees in front of him.

Neither the negro nor his prisoners heard the scouts approaching, but the latter heard Rocks saying:

"See here, nigger, don't you be fool enough to think all four of us is goin' ter hang, and that one of us won't git away, and that we will kill you sure as the sun shines if you don't let us go. That fool, Buffalo Bill, has gone off trustin' you, and our horses ain't far away, so we can all pack some provisions on, load up with gold, and be far away afore he comes back. As you say you are all on foot, ther scouts kin never catch us, and you'll git gold enough to last you all your days as a rich man."

"I'd ruther be a poor honest man than a rich one what had betrayed the gemman I owes my life to more than one time. You gemmen is as bad as you kin be, and I'm on ter your whole game now, though them in the valley don't know it. When dey does, your necks won't be worth nothin', I is a-thinkin', gemmens."

"Good for you, Beelzebub!"

The negro sprang to his feet, and was face to face with Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill.

The four prisoners scowled and muttered curses.

"Well, Beelzebub, we have found your Lost Valley."

"Done found it, Massa Bill?"

"Yes, we went through the break in the cliff where you so nearly lost your life yesterday."

"Yes, sah, you kin see it from there."

"I have sent Lasso Larry to our camp after the boys, and we will all go down into the valley when they come."

A rude laugh came from the prisoners, and Beelzebub said:

"How you goin' to git down dere, Massa Bill?"

"By the trail."

"What trail, sah?"

"Is there no trail?"

"No, sah."

"How did those people get there, then?"

"Dere was a trail den, sah, but only one, and it were through de pass and down de side of de cliff."

"It were mighty dangerous fer wagons, sah, but all right fer de people ter walk. Dey settle down in de valley, sah, and so many men work dere each day, making homes, and de others come up here and hunt fer gold in de cañon we came through, and find a good little bit, too. Saturday night dey all went down in de valley to preach, pray, sing, and rest ober Sunday, for most of 'em mighty good folks. One Saturday, Massa Bill, all went but four men—here dey is, right here now."

"Dey had been working on de cliff road, 'blastin' it out wid powder, for we brought our wagon along, all

full of powder, sah. Jist at sunset dere came what we all thought was a 'arthquake or volcano, and de whole front of de cliff fell into de valley.

"Dere was rocks and fire and smoke go way up inter de air, and three people in de valley was kilt dead—one man, one woman, and a little gal—and all was scared, sah. When dey got dere senses de next day, Sunday, dey came to de conclusion dat de four men, dese very gemmens here, hab let de powder git on fire and blew up de cliff and dem, too."

"But I now knows dat dese gemmens blowed up dat cliff on purpose, sah, dat dey might git all de gold what was found in de cañon and keep it. I now knows dat dey work hard ter git more; two of 'em went off after horses, and de other two stay here until they come back."

"Yer see, sah, as de men hunt gold in de cañon, and it is so far from de valley, plenty of provisions was kept here in dis cabin, and dey hab all dey want. But, Massa Bill, dem poor people in de valley was same as in jail, for dey couldn't git out. I done feel so sorry for 'em dat I say I try ter climb up de cliffs and go for help. Well, sah, de cap'n of de folks tell me dat if I got out, I must go for you, for you was a partic'lar friend of hisn."

"What is his name?"

"Massa Jack Bonehill, sah."

"Jack Bonehill! Why, he is my old scout and a very dear pard. I owe my life to him many times, God bless his old soul! So Jack Bonehill is the captain of these gold boomers of the Lost Valley, Beelzebub?"

"Yas, sah, and he tell me ter find you, but not tell you no more than dat dere is people lost here and in great trouble, and wants you to come and sabe 'em, for you was de only man as could."

"That is saying a great deal, Black Pard."

"It am true, sah."

"I'll vouch for that, Beelzebub, for no other man could have brought us here."

"We came under Beelzebub's prescription of black faces, Pawnee, until we reached our last camp, you know, when we washed off our false colors," said Buffalo Bill.

"The blackened faces saved us, no doubt, Cody, more than once, but still that does not take from your bringing us here."

"Yes, you is ther man thet c'u'd do it, and cuss ye fer doin' it, Buffalo Bill," growled Rocks.

Buffalo Bill laughed and then said:

"Go on with your story, Beelzebub."

"Well, Massa Bill, dere ain't much more ter tell, sah," resumed Beelzebub.

"You certainly got out of the valley."

"Yes, sah."

"How did you do it?"

"Well, sah, I am built like a cat, and kin climb any place I kin git a grip on. I went around hunting fer a place ter git up, and at last seen a shelf on a rock some two hundred feet up.

"We built a ladder, and I went up it, drivin' big iron nails inter the crevices of de cliff ter hold it dere

with ropes, and though it tuk weeks ter git ter that shelf, I got thar.

"From dere I c'u'd sling my lasso up to a tree in de cliff, forty feet away, and catch it. I tie my lasso end to de shelf in de cliff to come back by, and at last I climb up to de tree.

"Den I seen another tree I c'u'd lariat, sah, and I got dere, too. I were den jist about four hundred feet up de side of de cliff, and it hed tuk me weeks ter work up dere.

"I went on from dere, and seen I c'u'd climb up de balance of de way, so I concluded I were all right. Den I return to de valley, and it were ticklish work.

"But I got my weepsons, my camp outfit, and provisions, and start once more, ebery man sayin' he wouldn't risk it, nohow. Dey all seen me go up, and dey pray for me. I heards dem pray as I climb up and up.

"Many times I almost take a tumble, but I catch myself, and at last reach de top. I wave my hat and try ter holler fer joy, but I c'u'dn't do it, and I fell right down, I were so weak-kneed. Den I start on dat long tramp, Massa Bill, and find you; but I swear ter Massa Jack Bonehill I don't tell no one but you, for he say dey cum and rob 'em of de gold dey found, for nobody in de valley know dese four gemmens was so bad, and feel sorry for 'em, thinking dey was dead; but here dey was, plottin' ter git dat gold all de time.

"Ain't dey very wicked gemmens, Massa Buffler Bill and Massa Pawnee Bill?"

"They are Satan's own sons, Beelzebub," cried Pawnee Bill savagely; while Buffalo Bill replied:

"You, Beelzebub, are a hero of heroes, and as brave and noble a man as ever lived, be he white, black, yellow, or redskin. These four men did prepare that powder mine to blow off the edge of that cliff and keep those people in the valley, which your people call lost, and they were a lost people as well.

"But we have found them, and we have not come all this way not to get them out of their trouble, for they must go back with us. You told me to bring plenty of lariats, Beelzebub, and I did so, in addition to which we have those of the Six Satans and Doc Miner's party, so that we must have several thousand feet of lariats, which we can make a ladder out of, with the aid of blankets. We'll make them, never fear, and we'll get these people out, take my word for it."

"I believes you, Massa Bill."

"Now, Pawnee, you remain here to guard Beelzebub's gemmen while I go with him to reconnoiter that valley."

The chief of scouts and the negro then walked away together, and the latter led the way to where the edge of the cliff had been blown off by the four treacherous gold boomers.

Standing on the very edge of the precipice, Buffalo Bill began to watch the cliff sides with his glass.

"Try and make them see you, Beelzebub," said the scout.

The negro fired his rifle, and gave a loud hello.

Many faces were upturned at once; women and

children were seen running here and there, and a wild cheer arose as the negro was recognized.

The scene was a startling one, for the people in the valley were wild with joy.

Writing with a pencil upon several pages of his notebook, Buffalo Bill put them in his handkerchief, wrapped it around a large stone, and tossed it down into the valley. There was a wild rush for it at once.

"I told them, Beelzebub, that we were here, planning to get them out of their valley. That I had noticed that the winding trail along the face of the cliff had been blocked up where the rocks had fallen below, and also that it could readily be reached by lariats from here, and we would find a way to overcome all obstacles and rescue them."

"You'll do it, Massa Bill, and I kin see now, sah, dat a few lariats tied together will reach de old trail yonder."

"And if they have powder and can blast the rocks out that fell and choked up the trail where it reached the valley, we can bring that whole outfit out of that valley, though it may take us a couple of weeks, perhaps longer, to do so. I will write them what to do."

Another note was written and thrown down as before.

Captain Jack Bonehill himself picked it up, and his voice reached those on the cliff:

"God bless you, Buffalo Bill! We have plenty of powder, and can blast this end clear. We can spare you some if you will lower lines, and there is another

pass farther along, which you can blast out down to the trail."

"Good! We will begin work to-morrow, for all my men will be here then," was shouted back in the clear tones of Buffalo Bill, and a great cheer arising told him he had been heard, and hope filled every heart.

The scouts all assembled at night in the cabin in the cañon, and were hilarious over the capture of the four traitors and the success of the expedition thus far.

The next morning all assembled upon the cliff, and Beelzebub led the way to the other pass, and it could be seen that a little blasting would cut it down to the ledge, a natural road, which had been destroyed at both the upper and lower ends by the treachery of the four prisoners.

The people in the valley were already at work, and lariats were tied together and lowered, to be drawn up again with kegs and cans of powder.

This was put in the most advantageous places, a train was laid, a signal given to those in the valley to stand from under, and then the mountain shook under the explosion.

The scouts gave a cheer as they saw the success of their first blast.

For days this was kept up, and then the pass was clear to the ledge, so that a man could pass through it.

Then the work in the valley was begun, and again and again the mountain trembled under the giant shocks given its base.

Days went by, and then Buffalo Bill, Beelzebub, and

Pawnee Bill, with lariats swung over their shoulders, walked down the ledge toward the valley.

They came to within fifty feet of the bottom, and saw that a few more blasts would open the way, but they went down on their ladder of lassos, made fast to the rocks.

Who can describe the joy of all, the greeting that Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and Beelzebub met with?

But Buffalo Bill and his scout comrade told all that the negro was the hero, that he had done all, for he it was who had wandered so long and faithfully alone in his tramp to save them.

And the story was told of the treachery of four of their number, and Buffalo Bill made the request, as they were in the way of all hands working upon the cliff, that they be taken care of by guards in the valley.

They were then sent for, and their livid jaws showed their dread at meeting those they had so cruelly wronged.

Back to the cliff went Buffalo Bill and his two companions that night, and when they glanced down into the valley the following morning, four objects were seen that were not there the day before.

But at a glance the scouts saw that they were gallows, upon each of which a human form was swinging.

The people of the valley had punished the traitors in their own way.

And while the four forms swung to and fro, the gold boomers worked on untiringly; the rocks were blasted; the way made clear, and, springing upon a

horse that had belonged to the traitors, Beelzebub went down the trail along the face of the cliff to show that the way was clear; for Buffalo Bill said that the giant negro deserved the honor of going first.

That night the scouts slept in the valley, and the next morning all hands went to work repairing the wagons, harness, and shoeing the horses and mules, while preparations were made by the women for leaving the place, which, though a garden of beauty, had so long been to them a living tomb.

Just three weeks after the arrival of the scouts, the march was begun.

One wagon at a time was taken up the ledge trail; the women and children followed; then the extra horses, and next the cattle, sheep, and all that could be carried along.

One wagon carried the gold, and it was found that there was enough of it to give to each one of the band a few thousand dollars when coined.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill led the way; the scouts all mounted now, and with their faces blackened, to scare off any Indians that might obstruct their way.

Buffalo Bill knew that it was getting late in the season; the nights were very cold, there was snow in the air, and they would find that the Indians had gone into winter quarters; and unless they ran upon a village, they would meet none prowling about the country.

With a long glance at their homes, the march was begun by the people, and the Lost Valley was left

deserted and alone, and if it has been found by any of those who have since that time invaded the Grand Basin, it must be to them, now in its ruins, a mystery of the Big Horn.

After guiding the people of the Lost Valley to the nearest settlement, Cody and Pawnee Bill set out for Golden Gulch.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FAKER.

"Why is that crowd gathered there, Cody?"

"There's little use in guessing at it, Pawnee. Suppose we go and see."

The great scout and his pard were seated in front of the hotel in Golden Gulch. It was early in the evening. The street was quite deserted, save for the crowd mentioned by Pawnee Bill.

The scout's pard, Major Lillie—that was Pawnee Bill's right name—looked down the street, where, at some distance from them, there shone, through the early darkness, the glow of two lights, between which might be seen the head and shoulders of a man looming above those clustered about him.

A few minutes later, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were standing on the outskirts of the crowd, listening to the speaker, who stood on a platform. The lights shone down on his interesting face, bringing out in clear relief the heavy lines that marked it. His long, black hair, which he brushed back from his forehead now and then, made him one who would be noticed in almost any assemblage.

As the two scouts joined the crowd, the speaker's eye, keen and alert, noted them.

"I am sorry," he said at once, his voice low, but penetrating, "that every male or female inhabitant

of this town has not heard and seen me to-night—not me, but my works and what I am doing. Some have just joined the crowd. I cannot impose upon those who have listened to me so courteously by repeating what I have said, or doing over again what I have done. But I must repeat this: I am not here as one compensated according to the business I do. I am working on a salary—or I would not be able to do as I am doing. I confess that I have not the capital to carry on an advertising business of the kind I have outlined. But I am honest and try to give my employers—the biggest and wealthiest jewelry house in the world—full value for what they pay me."

"Advertising," whispered Pawnee Bill.

"Wait," responded the scout. "This is going to be interesting."

"And for that reason," continued the man on the platform, "I try to be as earnest as I can. I told you a little while ago that I was going to sell some little silver rings for fifty cents, and that, with each ring I sold, I would give a ticket calling for one dollar. The purchaser might keep the ring and receive back a dollar, thus making fifty cents in addition to having the ring—which is not costly, but which is at least worth the money. When I had finished selling the rings, I redeemed the tickets. I won't ask for confirmation of that—every man in the crowd knows that I made good. There are perhaps ten men here now who are four bits richer than they were, and have a pretty little ring for their sweetheart.

"Then," he went on, "I said that I would sell the

finest hunting knife ever seen in these parts for one dollar. And with each knife I would give a ticket calling for two dollars. After selling the knives—perhaps twenty of you had made up your minds that I was on the square then—I did redeem those tickets and give two dollars to each holder of a knife. So far I have made good.

"It is natural to ask why I am able to do do this. The answer is simple. The company for which I work have men traveling all over the country, just as I am, visiting the smaller towns. Those men come into personal contact with the citizens of the country, and the name of the house becomes well known. The house loses thousands—I might say a million dollars in this way—but whenever a man who has purchased from one of these agents wants to buy something that my people supply, jewelry and cutlery—he always remembers hearing the agent and seeing him give—yes, give money away.

"He turns to that house—out of curiosity, if from no other motive—and makes his purchase by mail. Now, I make solemn oath that I shall make absolutely nothing out of my sales to you, nor will the house which I represent. Those of you who have heard me, know that I have a final proposition to make. And you are waiting for that. I shall not keep you much longer. I shall be here at the hotel for several days. Any of you who want to see me, or to complain in any way of the manner in which I have treated you, can find me there—unless I am taking a walk in this glorious country.

"But I shall be at the hotel each night. I warn you, however, that I may not be able to make the same offer again that I make to-night. I shall have to look over my accounts and see if the thing is possible. Now comes the offer."

He drew himself up to his full height and surveyed the crowd before him, pausing a moment as though to allow his hearers to prepare themselves for what he was about to say.

"Now, here it is," he continued, turning and facing first one part of the crowd and then another. "I am going to sell to you, at five dollars each, some silver watches—silver, mind you!—not gold, as many fake concerns would do, giving you fake stuff—but watches that are worth twice that amount on account of the perfection of the works. I shall not go into uninteresting details as to how those watches are made, and what skill is put into them. You men don't care for words—you want results, and you will have to take my word that the results will follow your purchase of the watches.

"And," he paused again, leaning far forward, his long arm outstretched, "with each watch I am going to give a ticket that calls for—not ten dollars, nor five dollars, nor two dollars, nor one dollar—but that calls for a present. You will have to trust me in this case. Perhaps few of you will do this. Perhaps you will think that I have been standing up here and lying all this time. The fewer watches I sell, the less the firm loses. The advertisement will be just as good if I sell but one watch, for the man who buys that

one watch will get his present, and the whole town will know in a little while how lucky he was.

"Those who believe in me have this chance. Remember I have told you that I do not know whether or not I shall be able to make this offer to-morrow night. But I repeat that I shall be here. Now for the watches. Remember, I give a ticket that calls for no money—just a present, but a present that will be worth—I shan't say how much. Of course, the firm gives away no fortune, but the present will be worth at least as much as two of the watches."

In the momentary silence that followed, the man bent over a trunk that stood by him on the platform and thrust his hand into the tray.

The man then straightened up, holding a silver watch in his hand. It was a large affair, well calculated to please a man who wants something substantial.

"I am going to give you a moment to think the thing over," he said. "I see that you are talking among yourselves, and, no doubt, discussing the probable value of the present I shall give."

"Won't be worth nuthin'," came a voice from the crowd.

"That remains to be seen," replied the faker, with great dignity.

"Ye must think es how we're er gang o' fools," came another cry.

"We see yer game," called a third.

"If you are all so wise," remarked the man on the platform. "I would advise you not to purchase a watch.

In a moment I shall put them on sale, and it is immaterial to me whether you buy or not. I should like, however, to sell at least one watch, so that those who do not buy may find out what fools—yes, fools—they were not to trust me."

Buffalo Bill turned to Pawnee, a strange smile upon his face.

"And now," continued the man on the platform, "I want to repeat that my name is Craig Newton, and the name of the house for which I work is the Brandon Company, of New York City. It is a new concern, but very rich. You will receive literature from it soon, and when you purchase anything in the line of jewelry or cutlery, remember me and the way in which I have treated you. Now for the watches. Who, relying on the representations I have made, the things I have done, and the fact that with each watch goes a ticket calling for a present from me—who will buy a watch?"

Another silence followed. Man turned to man, and derisive laughter was heard everywhere. Then a rough voice shouted:

"I guess, mister, ye don't know wot sort o' fellers ye got ter deal wi' out here. We don't stan' fer no foolin' an' ef er feller humbugs us, he won't git outer town feelin' very comfortable. Ye ain't done nuthin' yet ter make us mad, an' ye better stop afore ye goes any further. Take ther advice of er feller thet knows."

A general shout of approval went up from the crowd, but the tall, black-haired man on the platform

stood motionless, the expression on his face unchanged.

When quiet was restored, he spoke in a low, unruffled tone.

"Who cares to buy a watch?" he said.

Not a hand was stretched toward him, and not a man left his place for a moment. Then, to the astonishment of Pawnee Bill, Cody worked his way through the crowd, stood before the man on the platform, and passed a five-dollar bill to him. The tall man handed out the watch he had been holding, and with it a small slip of paper. Buffalo Bill placed both in his pocket and awaited developments.

"Is there any one else?" came the question from the black-haired man, and there was a lack of interest in his voice.

The general murmur was low now, but no one offered to buy.

"In that case," continued the tall man, "as there is no one else who cares to take the chance——"

"Et ain't no chance—et's er sure thing fer ye," came the rough voice once more.

"As there is no one else who cares to take a chance," the tall man went on, "there remains nothing to do except give the present that the ticket calls for. But before doing so, I would say this: I supposed that you were good sports, like most of the men who live out in this country. As I see you are not, however, it may be that I shall decide not to remain with you as long as I intended."

"Ah—tole ye so," shouted one of the audience.

"He'll git out quick es he kin when he sees thet he can't fool us. But we've got sum o' his money, just ther same."

"Now that the gentleman has had his say," continued the faker, "I repeat that I may not stay as long as I had intended. I shall be here to-morrow night, however. I never run—though I don't believe that my house will make much out of advertising in a community like this."

There was absolute silence as he reached once more into the tray of his trunk and took out a little package. Then he leaned forward and looked at the scout.

"I believe that you purchased the watch?" he said. "Give me the ticket that calls for the present, if you please."

His manner, as he addressed Buffalo Bill, was quite different from that which he had so lately assumed in speaking to the crowd. It was as one gentleman talking to another.

Buffalo Bill, without replying, handed up the ticket, and received the package in return. Before he opened it, the man spoke again.

"I don't know whether you are a resident of this town or not," he said, "but I presume that many people here know you. I would like to have the men here feel sure that you are not a confederate of mine, and I would like to have you show them the present. It is only fair to me and the house that employs me to have you do this."

"Ye needn't worry erbout him!" cried a man standing near Buffalo Bill. "Ye couldn't pick out er feller

thet war straighter than he aire. Everybody knows him—'cept yerself, I guess."

"Then I am fortunate," replied the faker, as Buffalo Bill unwrapped the little package.

The scout smiled as he brought into view a tiny box of wood.

"Perhaps my imagination has been working overtime," he mused, "but I would like to know what this fellow's game is."

Then from the box he took a small, round locket. The metal was yellow—bright, gleaming. Slowly he opened the thing, and there, nestling inside, just fitting the locket, was what seemed to be a ten-dollar gold piece.

"Would you hold the little present up so that the other—the wise gentlemen of Golden Gulch—can see?" asked the man on the platform.

Buffalo Bill passed the locket and the piece of gold up to the tall man, and the latter held them just beneath the light so that its rays brought out all the sparkle of the brilliant metal.

There was a united gasp from the men in the crowd, but in a moment cries and laughter mingled in the air.

"Counterfeit!"

"'Tain't gold et all!"

"Fake!"

"Run 'im outer town!"

The faker's long arm was raised, his hand open, calling for silence.

"Time will tell whether the coin is a counterfeit, and whether or not the metal of the locket is gold.

I presume the purchaser, whom you all seem to know, will be glad to inform you on that point. Meanwhile, good night."

Quickly the tall man put out the lights, and, with the aid of two men whom he had hired for that purpose, removed the trunk from the platform. Then he disappeared in the darkness in the direction of the hotel.

Men crowded about Buffalo Bill, asking questions and calling on him to tell them whether he had been fooled or not.

"I shall have to make an examination later," was the scout's reply.

He found Pawnee Bill, and the two walked toward the hotel.

"Well?" queried Pawnee Bill.

"The coin is genuine and the locket is gold," said Cody. "I believe that that faker has brains. And a man with brains wouldn't be apt to play such an old game as the people here think he was playing."

"Then you believe that he isn't through with his game yet?"

"Hardly," was Buffalo Bill's answer.

"What does he call himself?"

"Craig Newton."

CHAPTER XVI.

CRAIG NEWTON ATTACKED.

When they reached the hotel, Pawnee Bill and the chief of scouts parted for the night, and it did not take long for Buffalo Bill to lose consciousness in sleep. He had the power to put away from his mind the problems that he had been thinking of, when it came time to rest, though it was always with sense ready to respond to the faintest call that his sleep came to him.

So it was that, not long after he had closed his eyes, the king of scouts found himself sitting up straight in his bed. What had wakened him he did not know, but there was in his brain the consciousness that something was wrong.

Suddenly he did hear a sound. It was like the grating of wood against stone. And it brought to Buffalo Bill a feeling, inexplicable, but deep, that he was needed.

He was on his feet in a moment, standing motionless, trying to tell whence the sound came. There it was again, and it came surely from the room next to him.

Then Buffalo Bill heard a word spoken. Not clearly and distinctly, but a muffled word.

He darted into the hall, and was at the door of the adjoining room in a second. It was closed, but, as

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he heard once more the smothered word, he placed his hand on the knob and turned it gently.

It was absolutely dark in the hall, and, as the scout opened the door, which, he found, was unlocked, no light penetrated the apartment.

For a moment he stood in the half-open door, listening. Again he heard a voice. Also the scraping of feet on the floor.

"Cowards!" he heard the voice say.

He tried to place the speaker in the darkness. A second longer he hesitated, then suddenly struck a match, and, by its light, darted to the relief of the man he now saw was being attacked by two burly fellows. And the man who was at the mercy of the others was Craig Newton.

The tall, black-haired man was on the floor, each hand gripping the throat of one of his adversaries, while one of the latter held, poised above Newton's head, a long knife, which gleamed in the light from the match of the scout.

"Do what you can with the man you're holding with your right hand," said Buffalo Bill, as he seized the one with the knife. "I'll attend to the other."

And then, in the darkness of the room of the little Western hotel, there ensued a terrific hand-to-hand battle, the scout grappling with one of Newton's assailants, the tall man with the other.

Nor did Newton stop to inquire who it was that had thus come to his rescue. He uttered not a word. But, from the sounds the scout heard, he was sure that Newton had succeeded in regaining his feet.

Buffalo Bill himself soon found that he had enough to do to take care of the man with the knife. Fortunately he had been able to grasp the wrist of the hand that held it, and now he knew that he must hold that wrist or feel the cold steel that he had seen gleaming in the light.

Back and forth across the floor he and his antagonist swayed, their bodies pressed close together. Once the scout had the man bending backward and almost to the floor, but a sudden wriggle brought him straight again, and his tremendous strength all but conquered the king of scouts.

It was a silent fight. Evidently the attacking men were afraid to shoot, for there was no sign of guns, and Newton, for some reason, did not call out.

Now, by a great effort, Buffalo Bill was able to slip his hand farther down the wrist of the man opposed to him, and then he, too, was gripping the handle of the knife. A powerful twist of his own wrist, a creaking as though from the breaking of a bone, and the knife fell to the floor with a distinct, sharp thud.

"Ah," muttered Buffalo Bill, and then, with his hand now free, he struck the arm of the fellow gripping him, and, with the powerful fist that had caused so many to lie prostrate before him, the king of scouts dealt his opponent a blow that hurled him to the floor.

In a second the scout, confident that the man he had struck would not rise for a moment at least, touched a match to the lamp he had seen in the one

view of the room he had, and then was bending over his conquered foe. The man on the floor did not move, and the scout turned to Newton and his opponent.

The two were locked in a grasp that seemed unbreakable, but now Buffalo Bill had his gun out and was covering the stranger.

"Better break away," he said quietly. "We've got the best of you, you see."

But the man still held to Newton, and the latter, wrenching free one arm, managed to get in a blow that shook the other to his very toes.

Buffalo Bill, realizing that Newton had the man at his mercy for the time, took the opportunity to bind the man on the floor with a bit of strong cord he had in his pocket, and, this done, he lost no time in exerting his great strength to separate the others, grinding Newton's opponent to the floor beneath his weight.

The tall man silently came to the scout's assistance and took from him the cord which was to render his late antagonist as helpless as his companion, and presently the two strangers were lying side by side on the rough carpet, their eyes blazing, bound hands and feet.

"So," muttered one of them, "ye take sides wi' er stranger ergin' two boys o' ther West, do ye?"

"I don't know you any more than I know him—or as much," replied the scout.

"Then wot business es et o' yourn?"

"I see two men attacking another in his room. There isn't anything for me to do except side with the one. If you didn't mean anything out of the way, all we have to do is to let you go."

Buffalo Bill smiled as he uttered these words, and, turning to Newton, saw his smile reflected on the tall man's face.

"You see," said Newton, mopping his face with his handkerchief, "I was sleeping peacefully when these fellows woke me. They didn't intend to do it, of course, but I am a light sleeper, and when they began to feel around underneath my pillow, where I often have some valuables, I naturally woke up. Thank you for your timely help."

"You seemed to be getting on fairly well when I struck the match," replied the scout, treating the matter as lightly as the black-haired man had done.

"But it couldn't have lasted," returned Newton quickly. "I had a feeling that there was a knife somewhere about, and when your match blazed up, I assure you that it wasn't a very pleasant sight to see how close to my body the thing was. It would have been—well, buried in another moment. Your match did the right thing."

"The question is now," said Buffalo Bill, "what are we to do with these fellows?"

"Oh, let them go. They won't trouble me again—and I don't mind taking a few chances. You see, I shall have my gun a bit more handy after this, and take more pains about putting something in front of my door. Then I shall wake in time to see that no one gets any farther than the threshold. I was a bit careless to-night, and didn't take any precautions."

Buffalo Bill faced the prisoners.

"I would like," continued Newton, looking thought-

fully at the pair on the floor, "to let these fellows go. I would like to have them spread the story of how they attacked me and tried to kill me, and how I turned them loose, after I, with your assistance, had beaten them. But, after all, there are certain objections to doing that."

"They wouldn't spread the story," said the scout. "If they said anything about it, they would certainly put themselves in a better light."

"That is my main reason for changing my attitude," continued the tall man.

Buffalo Bill was silent, and Newton turned to the door.

"So," he went on presently, "if you will keep watch over them for a little while, I will call some one and have them taken away. I presume that there is some sort of a lockup in this town?"

"I presume so," responded Buffalo Bill.

Newton left the room, and presently returned with the deputy sheriff and the proprietor of the hotel. The official nodded to Buffalo Bill and then touched the men on the floor with the toe of his boot—and none too gently.

"Git up," he said.

The bonds were removed from the ankles of the men, and, accompanied by the hotel proprietor, who had expressed his anger that a guest should thus be disturbed, in no uncertain terms, the deputy marched the prisoners from the room at the point of his gun.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUFFALO BILL PERPLEXED.

According to his custom, Buffalo Bill was up shortly after dawn the next morning, and was sitting, before breakfast, in front of the hotel, enjoying the fresh air of the new day.

He was joined soon after by Pawnee Bill.

The two now entered the hotel and found that breakfast was ready. Craig Newton, looking fresh and strong, as though he had enjoyed a good night's sleep, was there, eating heartily.

He nodded cordially to Buffalo Bill and his pard, and called to them across the small room.

"A perfect day, I see," he said. "It is just the kind that calls me into the wilds. I'm off for the whole day. Hope I don't get lost."

"Just keep your eye on the trail," replied the scout. "You'll find plenty of beauty of scenery if you follow it, and you'll be sure to be back in time for your evening's entertainment."

The pards finished just as Newton left the room, and resumed their seats in front of the hotel.

"I have an idea," said Buffalo Bill, "that something will develop after a while. I'm willing to take my chances, anyway, and see whether or not I am wrong. Frankly, I want to see what Newton is up to. I confess that for once I am curious."

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Pawnee Bill did not reply, and soon, from around the corner of the building, came the object of their thoughts, mounted on his horse, and looking as though he intended to have a full day of enjoyment away from the haunts of man.

He smiled brightly as he passed them, and Buffalo Bill watched him with keen eyes.

"Hope to see you to-night," said Newton. "If I don't show up, tell the crowd that I'm lost. My trunk is there in the hotel—and some more of the presents are in keeping of the proprietor—so I guess they'll see me again."

With a boyish laugh, he rode off in the direction of the trail that led through forest into a wild country.

Buffalo Bill remained motionless a moment, then stepped forward and bent over the ground. Presently he returned and resumed his seat.

"Well," said Pawnee Bill, "it wouldn't hurt me to know just what you did that for."

"I was looking at the tracks made by Newton's horse," was the scout's reply.

"Is there anything strange about the shoes the animal wears?"

"Yes. The shoe on the nigh forefoot has been worn down at the tips. It would be an easy track to follow."

Now, up the street, from the direction opposite to that which Newton had taken, came a strange procession. Half a dozen men on horseback rode slowly along, their looks turned on the distant figure of the

tall man. Presently, when opposite Buffalo Bill and his pard, they halted.

The scout rose, and walked forward to the side of the leader's horse.

"Look here," he said quietly, "I don't blame you for thinking that there is something queer about that man, Craig Newton, but I do repeat that he's done nothing wrong yet, and I don't see what business it is of ours what he does to-day as long as we haven't anything against him. If your pards are half drunk, as we imagine they are, there is no telling what they'll do to him if they imagine they have something on him. Just remember that, and don't do anything to a stranger till you're sure that you are right about his not being straight. You mean to follow him now, do you not?"

"Yes, Buffalo Bill," replied the man. "We know you, and we'll be careful. But," and a frown came to his face, "we're wise enough to know that them clever fellers from the East can think up a lot of things to do to get the best of a feller, and if he's that kind, and is going to try anything, we're goin' to stop him—that's all." Then the leader raised his voice and called to his companions.

"Come on, boys. He's gone up the trail, and we can follow him easy. I guess he won't git far from it. Come on."

The band was on the move now, and, as they started out, the scout noticed that the men other than the leader were far less sober than was he. Every

man had a frown on his face, and some of those faces were not pleasant to look upon.

When they had disappeared, the scout turned to Pawnee Bill.

"Did you notice anything peculiar about the outfit that Newton had with him? I have just thought of it."

"Big saddlebags—that's all."

"The bags looked as though they were well filled."

"He intends to be away all day," responded Pawnee Bill. "Probably the bags were full of grub."

"That may be. And if what he told us is true—that he was lost once before on a trip like this, he may have taken an extra supply with him—just as a precaution in case he missed his way again."

"That probably explains it."

But now Buffalo Bill was on his feet.

"And," he said quickly, "if that crowd of fellows reach him and find that he has provisions for several days in his bags, or if they find that he has his valuables with him, won't they be apt to think that he's planning to get out?"

"Sure. But he has a right to get out, hasn't he—if he's paid up here at the hotel?"

"He has a right to," returned Buffalo Bill, "but if I know those men, they won't think of his rights. They'll just think that he's trying to fool them, and where will they stop? They'll get even first, and try to find out what he's done afterward."

"I'll see about his bill here, and whether he's left his valuables, as he told us he had," remarked Pawnee

Bill, who now entered the hotel and sought the proprietor. The man said that Newton had left a small hand bag with him, saying that it was very valuable, and that the man's trunk was still in his care. But he has seen no money or valuables, and the hotel bill had not been paid.

Pawnee Bill reported to the king of scouts.

"I didn't want to play the spy on him," said Buffalo Bill, "but now I am able to persuade myself that we ought to take a hand in matters. Perhaps I am fooling myself and making myself believe that I am going after him just because I think he is in danger from the men of Golden Gulch, when, in fact, I am going because I am curious. But, at any rate, I am going."

They hurried to the stable and saddled their horses. In a few minutes they were started on their way in the track of Craig Newton and the Golden Gulch band.

It was a glorious morning, and now that the pards were surrounded by the great trees of the forest through which the trail led, they spoke in low tones, as was their custom. And then, suddenly, Buffalo Bill raised his hand quickly and leaned forward, listening intently.

From what seemed a long way, came a peculiar, smothered sound. It was not the call for help of a man or woman. It was not the cry of a wild beast, and yet there was something of both in the sound.

"What?—that comes from a great distance," said Pawnee Bill, now catching the sound.

"Perhaps," replied the scout. "But some way it seems to me that it is near at hand."

They fastened their horses, and Buffalo Bill made an investigation of the trail once more. There could be no doubt but that Newton had ridden on past this spot, and there were the tracks of the Golden Gulch men also. The sound which they had just heard, therefore, had nothing to do with them in all probability.

The pards pressed forward. Once more there came to them a repetition of the strange sound, and then all was quiet and they had nothing more than their remembrance of the direction whence it had come, to guide them.

At a point where the ground rose, whence they were able to see some distance through the trees, Buffalo Bill, who had been leading, stopped and peered through the foliage.

Pawnee Bill stood at his side, and it was then, for the third time, that they heard the strange, appealing cry, and it was then that they recognized—or, at least, had a suspicion—what sort of an animal was calling to them.

One look passed between the pards, and then, silent as the wild animal in its native haunts, and as sure of their course as the beast in search of its prey, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill started forward down the declivity, taking care, as they proceeded, to keep their bodies as much hidden as possible and their eyes alert to any sight that might present itself to them.

Suddenly, as Buffalo Bill darted behind a great tree,

and his companion, noting his move, followed suit, there came again the weird call of the animal—and now that sound was very near to them. It was followed by guttural exclamations, and then, between the trees, the pards saw the forms of three Indians running forward, away from them.

The red men stopped at a place where the underbrush was so dense that the eye could not penetrate it, and one of them disappeared. In a moment he was seen once more, and in his hands were what seemed to be straps.

Now, as the pards watched, there appeared from behind the underbrush something that was like a great bag, tossed and moving through the air. Again the sound reached them, and now it was plain that it came from the baglike thing. Then, following that, appeared the body of an animal.

The head of the beast had been covered with something—and it was the head that gave the appearance that was so strange.

The Indian was pulling at the bridle, and the animal was moving slowly forward.

"Vat you like do it to me," came a voice, "put ton't hurt dat mu-el."

Buffalo Bill, a half laugh in his heart, darted forward, followed by Pawnee Bill. The moment they had reached the place where the Indians were surrounding the mule, they saw, lying bound on the ground, their old pard—the baron, otherwise William von Schnitzenhauser. At sight of Buffalo Bill and

Pawnee Bill, the baron gave vent to a cry that warmed the heart of the pards.

"Look id oudt," he cried. "Dey four off Indians vas—look id oudt, Puffalo Pill—dey vas drunk."

The Indian had dropped the bridle of the baron's mule now, and he, with the other two, had grasped their knives and were standing, tense, waiting for a moment to strike. They were not covered with war paint, but wore the clothes to which they were accustomed on the reservation. One good look at them told the scout that the baron was right—the red men had somewhere gotten hold of whisky, and this was the explanation of their treatment of the baron.

But explanation or no explanation, there was no question but that there was blood in their eyes at this minute. And even before the scout and his pard expected it, the attack came.

The three darted forward simultaneously, their knives raised for a second, then plunged downward, aimed at the hearts of the white men. The scout and Pawnee Bill could have shot them in their tracks, for they had their guns ready, but the thought of the war that might follow the killing of three of the red men, and the terrible cruelty and the blood that would flow, deterred them both, and they sought to overcome their antagonists without resorting to extremes.

With a move so quick that the eyes of the Indians, now dimmed by liquor, could not follow it, Buffalo Bill escaped the descending knife of one of the red men, and, catching another off his balance, felled him to the ground with his fist.

Pawnee Bill was less fortunate, and, as the king of scouts turned to face the Indian who had just missed him with his knife, Pawnee felt the knife of the third Indian grazing his side.

He turned, was upon the red man, and in a second had wrenched the weapon from his hand and was pressing him to the ground, driving the breath from his lungs.

Buffalo Bill was grappling with the man who had come so near ending his life, while the second Indian was lying motionless on the ground, where he had fallen from the blow of the king of scouts.

"Goot—goot—goot!" came the baron's voice again. "Put I you tells dat dey iss anodder—a pig fellow—look oudt for him."

Pawnee Bill, reminded by the baron's voice that all was not yet over, pulled a stout cord from his clothing and bound the hands and feet of the fallen Indian. His own blood fell on the upturned, red face of the man, and his own shirt was saturated, but this he forgot. He had his late antagonist helpless by the time Buffalo Bill, throwing his lithe opponent over his shoulder and following this move with a sudden leap to his chest, had secured the first Indian. The one the scout had struck was motionless, and binding him was a mere formality.

Now the three Indians were lying side by side, their sullen faces and deep-set eyes turned upon their captors.

"I vas glad—you here come—vat to call at dis time made you come?" And the baron wriggled in his

happiness, unable to move on account of the ropes with which he was bound.

"You see," replied Buffalo Bill, "we were invited to this party by your precious mule. We were 'way up on the trail when we heard this call, but did not feel like resisting the invitation."

Pawnee Bill was busy with the baron's bonds, and now that foreign gentleman stood up, stretched, and shook his fist at the Indians before him.

The baron then turned his attention to the arrangement that had been placed about the head of the mule, and when at last he succeeded in removing it, and the loud hee-haw of the animal could be heard without anything to interfere with the sound, the baron's face was wreathed in smiles.

"How peautiful vas it?" he exclaimed. "Sometimes his voice makes me think off dat opera—I vonce heard—so clear, so machestic, und so grant."

"But how did all this happen? Where did you see these Indians, and where were you going?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"So many kvestions you ask it," replied the baron, with a frown. "I have yust through a pad time been, und I cannot clearly think."

"Perhaps you had some of the stuff that the Indians have been taking," suggested the scout, with a twinkle in his eye.

"You me insult," cried the baron. "Put I forgive you since you my life have saved. I knew dat Golden Gulch you vas at, und I lonely vas. Vy should I not to Golden Gulch myself go mit my mu-el? I see no

reason. So I start oudt. Der trail I do not like—it iss too long yet—so I through der voods come. Talking to my mu-el, I come to der Indians. Von off dem come—ask me for whisky. I gife him not any—it is against de law of dis country—und der law I respect. Der Indian he too near my mu-el he come, und der mu-el, he der law respect, too. Der mu-el, he tell Indian no whisky, put der mu-el he tell it mit his hoof—und der Indian go away—und I fall over der mu-el's head—not expecting such a talkiness. Der Indians vas mad yet, und upon me und my mu-el dey fall. You der rest know—but now it all right vas.”

The explanation was very clear, and Buffalo Bill and Pawnee fancied that they could picture the anger of the drunken Indians when they saw one of their number kicked by a white man's animal. But what had become of the fourth member of the party remained a mystery which the baron seemed unable to solve for them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LOVER OF SOLITUDE.

“Well,” said Pawnee Bill, “now that we have these Indians, what are we going to do with them?”

Before Buffalo Bill could reply, the red men rose to their feet and stood a moment before the man who treated them as few in that country would have done.

“Pa-e-has-ka friend of Indian,” said the spokesman, with great dignity. “Fire water no friend of Indian.”

“You tell Pa-e-has-ka where Indian get fire water?” asked the scout.

“Reservation—now all gone,” and the scout believed the words of the red man.

“Pa-e-has-ka tell Indian go back. Keep all quiet, like now. No warpath.”

“No give word—Indian not know,” was the honest answer.

“Indian has had council of war?”

“Talk-talk—mebbe.”

“No war yet?”

“No war yet.”

“Pa-e-has-ka ask Indian help keep quiet. Go.”

“Mebbe great chief say war—then war. Mebbe great chief say no war—then no war. What great chief say—they come.”

The king of scouts knew the futility of attempt-

ing to persuade the red men to take any other view of the matter, but he trusted to the story that they would tell when they reached the village to do some good if it should reach the ears of the chief. He bowed silently as the Indians disappeared into the woods.

The scouts now started through the woods in the direction of the trail where they had left their horses, and the baron brought up the rear, riding his precious beast. But all the time the scout was thinking of the fourth Indian who had disappeared. He had refrained from asking the other red men about it, for he knew that they would refuse to tell him, and it was his custom to use his knowledge of what they would and what they would not do, and never try to get them to say anything that at the beginning he felt they would refuse to tell. And the actions of one of their party would never be spoken of by the others—the scout had learned that many years ago.

They found their mounts where they had left them, and a quick investigation told Buffalo Bill that Newton had not passed back over the trail, nor had the half dozen men from Golden Gulch. It certainly began to look as though the tall man had tried to get away as the citizens of the town had suspected he would.

"But," said the scout, as he and Pawnee Bill were mounting their horses, "I don't see where he could be bound for, starting as he did in this direction. It is a great distance to any town, and a lot of wild country would have to be passed over."

They rode rapidly over the trail which was very good and even. The tracks of Newton's horse were

visible wherever the ground was soft. But it was afternoon now, and it would be all that they could do to get back to town by dark, even if they started at once. And Buffalo Bill knew that Newton intended to return in time to do his usual evening's work on the street.

They hurried on. They felt the need of a bite to eat, but the king of scouts, with his new thought in his mind, did not feel like taking the time to stop for a meal. They pulled a bit of hard-tack out of their saddlebags and did the best they could to make this answer. They stopped at a spring and refreshed themselves and watered their horses. Then they took up the trail again, and made the best time they could in the direction of the Indian reservation, which they were now nearing. The Indians whom the scout had turned loose had evidently decided to take another way to their village, or else they kept out of sight of the white men. At any rate, they were not seen, and the scout dismissed the thought of them from his mind—all except the fourth red man, and of him he thought often.

Of course the baron had to be informed of all that had happened at Golden Gulch, and many and interesting were the comments he made on the situation. He was all eagerness to see the present Buffalo Bill had received, and equally as eager to get back to town and have a chance to buy one of the watches himself and make the money that purchasing one evidently meant.

They had reached a spot where the trail was very

hard and no tracks were visible. Without stopping to make a more thorough examination, which would probably tell whether or not the party had passed over this particular portion of the way, Buffalo Bill slowed down, and, as they were on high ground at this time, he took the opportunity to look as far ahead of him as he could through the trees.

Almost directly in front of them the ground rose in a steep ascent, and at the top of the miniature mountain there was a clearing, so that the highest point of the ground was visible, outlined against the sky.

As Buffalo Bill looked, he pulled his horse to a halt. Then his hand was stretched out, his finger pointing to that high, bare part of the country. The eyes of his two pards were turned in that direction, and there, silhouetted against the sky, was the tall form of Craig Newton.

As the pards ascended the hill, they lost sight of the tall figure standing on the very highest point of ground, and it was not until they were very close to him that they saw the man again.

And now they were able to hear the words he uttered. Now soft, now thrilling, now loud and intense, came the tones of the rich voice.

It was a born orator—or actor—who was speaking, and in spite of himself, and in spite of the suspicion which he had of the man, Buffalo Bill was impressed. It seemed as though some one was talking from another land—and in inspired words.

Those words were written by the greatest poet of history.

For a moment only, Buffalo Bill paused. Then, with a loud-spoken word to his horse, he rode upward and forward, and in a moment was beside the tall man. An amused smile was upon Craig Newton's face as he recognized Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill. He looked but a moment at the baron, and evidently sized him up at once as a friend of the scout.

"Ah," said Newton, in much the same tone as that in which he had been reciting, "it is a pleasure to see a strong, manly face in a place like this, where there is nothing within sight—nothing of nature, I mean—that is not strong. I welcome you to the place I have found whence I can look over what seems to be the whole of the earth."

"Whatever your business," the scout said, "you should be upon the stage. That recitation of yours was wonderful, Newton."

"I wouldn't be happy acting for people," was the tall man's reply. "I don't believe that I could do it. But perhaps, after to-day's experience, I shall have the nerve to try it. I've done pretty well to-day for a beginner—an amateur."

"Which reminds me," responded the scout, "that I am very curious to know what has become of a certain party of six men who rode out of Golden Gulch this morning shortly after you did, and just before I left that place."

"I don't wonder that you are curious about them," replied Newton. "I was rather curious myself, and then my curiosity changed to a different feeling. I thought for a time that I was going to be disturbed in

my day's pleasure, but I was not. In fact, I am greatly pleased at the unconscious compliment that they have paid me."

"You have seen them, then?" asked the scout.

"I have seen them and have had the pleasure of spending most of my time with them."

"I can't understand quite——"

"They appeared shortly after I had reached this place and seemed to be in an ugly frame of mind. I did my best to convince them that what I did with my spare time was none of their business, but I fear I failed. They had a lot of stuff to drink with them, and the more they took of it, the more insulting they became."

"I thought such a thing was possible," interposed the scout.

"And at last they began to investigate my belongings with the evident intention of finding what I was going to do during the next few hours. When they opened my saddlebags, which I had loaded with provisions to guard against hunger in case I should get lost, they seemed to think that they had discovered me in the perpetration of some terrible crime."

"You guessed it," muttered Pawnee Bill to the scout.

"And then things began to take a serious turn," the tall man went on. "For a time I didn't know but that it would be well for me to run after all, and leave what valuables I had back at the hotel. But I hate to run, and I tried to think of a way to get out of the difficulty without turning my back, as they ordered I

should do, and running for it. I have never done that yet, and I hated to start in."

"It is not a pleasant thing to be compelled to do," agreed Buffalo Bill.

"Unt vere," interposed the baron, now quite enraptured by the man, "did you dose men put—vat tit you do?"

"I craved of them one privilege. I was very humble, and the men began to get almost sorry for me. It is amusing to think of, but I really shed tears when I seemed to take in the fact that I would be driven out of their glorious land—disgraced in their eyes and in the eyes of the citizens of Golden Gulch, whom, as I told them, they so fittingly represented."

"The favor you requested?"

"To sing to them my favorite song—I asked them to allow me to do that. The refreshment that they had taken made them feel that they would rather enjoy a good song, and the fact that they had apparently persuaded me to go with as little trouble as they had had, put them in a good humor. They were perfectly willing that I sing to them."

"Yes—I see, and am waiting for the result with interest—but I fancy I can see what it was," and the scout smiled inwardly.

"The representatives of Golden Gulch seated themselves, bottles all around, and prepared to hear my song. I am not a great singer, and I guess that I recited the song rather than sang it. The ballad began in the liveliest manner, but, as I proceeded and noticed that they were listening with evident pleasure,

I turned into a rather monotonous refrain and changed the air to a slow one—full of sadness. By the time I had finished that song, one of the crowd was asleep. I did not wait for an encore, but began another—this time a song that is most soothing, if properly done. More whisky came to my rescue, and another of the band passed away. And so I went on. Occasionally one would stagger to his feet, apparently realizing that I was not getting out of the country, but after a little—being polite and not wishing to interrupt my song—I would be able to persuade him to let me have one more fling. I take pleasure in showing you the result—it was accomplished some time ago, and I have since that time been having my pleasure, reciting and talking to the four corners of the earth, as I saw fit. I was about to start back to town when you appeared—and very glad I am that you came. See?"

Now Craig Newton moved a little distance from the spot where he had been standing, and, with his long arm pointed to a place, hidden from the point on which he had been standing, but now in full view of the pards, where the ground was soft and inviting, and where the sun did not penetrate.

There, in the cool shade, lay six men—asleep. There was the Golden Gulch band, soothed into unconsciousness by the wonderful voice of the man with the black hair.

Then it was that the pards joined Newton in his laugh.

Buffalo Bill had turned away and was walking up and down at some distance from them. Suddenly,

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unseen by any of the others, he stooped to the ground on which his eyes had been fixed in his apparently aimless walk, and picked something from it. A moment he held the thing in his hand, and then slipped it into his pocket just as the others joined him.

The horses were then mounted and the four men started for the town of Golden Gulch, leaving the sleepers to their own devices.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEWTON'S COURAGE.

In silence they rode on. Now and again the scout could hear the baron talking to his mule, or, less often, to Pawnee Bill. It was quite dark now, and when, at last, they emerged from the forest and saw the first buildings that made up the town of Golden Gulch, the lights, blazing in the saloon and in the hotel, stood out clearly.

They soon saw that the street was crowded—crowded for a town of the size of Golden Gulch. In front of the saloon a group of men were talking eagerly, and, as they rode up to the hotel and dismounted, they were immediately surrounded.

"Well," cried a rough voice, "whar be ther other fellers—hev ye killed 'em off wi' sum o' yer magic?"

Other questions were hurled at Newton as soon as he was recognized, and many attempts to get Buffalo Bill and his pards away from the others in order to hear the latest news from the front.

Newton, as soon as he was able, mounted the steps of the hotel, raised his hand, and waited for silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have had a very interesting day, and I am sure that you will be glad to hear about it. I do not feel quite like turning from it to the sordid business of selling goods. You will have to go without your presents to-night, but if you care

to hear a good story—a story with a lesson, I will be glad to tell it to you. Just now I am very tired and hungry. I shall get something to eat in the hotel, after which you will find me on my platform down the street. I shall sell no goods to-night, but those of you who care to hear what I have to say, may do so."

He turned and entered the hotel. Buffalo Bill and his pards had already started on their belated supper when Newton came into the room. They ate in silence, the tall man apparently preoccupied once more, thinking, perhaps, what he should say to the men who were now waiting eagerly to hear his story.

Those men outside saw the lights carried down the street and placed in the position they had occupied the night before. The platform had been left there, and gradually a crowd began to collect in front of it. Conversation was general, and it was plainly to be seen that Newton, whatever else he had done, had made a great impression, and the fact that he was not to give away any more presents that night was completely forgotten in the desire to hear what had happened when the six men from town had overtaken him. For every male inhabitant knew by this time that the six had left with the intention, if they discovered anything, of driving the man away, never to show his face there again. That he had come back, and the others were still absent, required an explanation that all were anxious to hear.

It was through this expectant crowd that Craig Newton, after keeping the people waiting while he had his supper in peace, made his way. He mounted

the platform and stood a moment in silence, looking them over.

Presently he raised his hand for silence.

"So you are worried about your friends who went out to spy upon me and drive me from town, are you?" began Newton, a fine scorn in his voice. "Well, let me assure you first of all that they are perfectly safe—as safe as they would be in their own bunks—unless they have fallen off from their horses or some other accident of the sort has happened to them."

He paused a moment, but now the silence was absolute.

"And I have not done away with them with any of my magic. I wish that they were here now to listen to what I have to say to you people of Golden Gulch—a pretty name for a town whose citizens' hearts are made of alloy—at least the hearts of those who stood for having a stranger insulted as I have been insulted."

"We'll hear their side of the story—remember that," came a voice from the crowd.

"I don't believe that they'll have a great deal to say," returned Newton, his eyes blazing now. "I don't believe that they'll remember much of what happened to-day. I said last night that I might not stay as long among you as I had intended, and I repeat that to-night. But the fact that you have taken such an interest in me may make me change my mind. I might decide to settle down here and make this beautiful town my home. You see, I would feel so safe, for I would be sure that wherever I went I would have a bodyguard—an able bodyguard," he went on. his lip curl-

ing in sarcasm, "that would see to it that I did nothing wrong. How sure I would feel that my life would be a perfect one—watched over as I would be here among you."

There was an uneasy stir in the crowd. The man was making them angry, and only the interest they had to hear all that he had to say, prevented an outbreak.

"Look out, feller," cried the man with the unusually rough voice, "we ain't fellers ter be fooled wi'. Better be keerful wot ye say."

But Newton did not seem to heed the man. His eyes were looking far over the crowd, and now, watching him, many a man turned and tried to discern through the darkness the thing that had interested the tall man.

Newton did not speak for a moment, and when he again opened his lips, his words came thrilling and fast.

"There!" he cried, stretching out his arm in the direction of the trail over which he had passed that day. "There is the courageous band that left here this morning to spy on me. If you all turn, you will be able to see the six of them passing the hotel. I wonder if they will have the nerve to come here and hear what I have to say. If they do, I shall not change a word that I was going to say to you. I hope that they will come."

Again he stopped, and now a few of the men who had been standing in front of him, left the outskirts of the crowd and ran in the direction of the dark figures on horseback. Scarce a word was spoken as all

waited to see whether or not the men would come, and Newton dominated the gathering.

The question was soon settled. In a group, led by one who had left the crowd to tell them what was going on, the late bodyguard, as Newton had called it, approached and stood within reach of his voice. They were a tired-looking lot, and sullen—sullen to the point of speechlessness.

The tall man did not give any one time to interrupt him. Anger and fire were in his eyes, and his words came sharp and incisive.

"There they are—there they are," he cried. "If they had not been crazy—if the whole lot of you had not been crazy—they would not now be in the position they are—and of which they are ashamed. Yes, they followed me—I felt that something like that would happen. But I supposed that I would have reasonable men to deal with. Instead of that I found half a dozen drunks—drunks—and what do you think I did? If there could be anything more humiliating to them, I would have done it. But I could think of nothing. You boast of this great West, where all men do as they please, and where one man does not consider that he is his brother's keeper. And yet you thought that I ought to have a keeper. Well, there are six of them—and I put them to sleep by reciting poetry to them—poetry—poetry about love—and the sweet, soft things of life. They closed their eyes and passed away just because my voice was gentle—passed away like so many babies—and they have just wakened. Leave me alone—leave me alone, I tell you, or I shall

think up something that will drive you all out of your own town—so great will be your humiliation."

He stopped, looked down at the crowd for a moment, and then dropped to the ground. The astonishment and wonder that pervaded the men before him held them motionless for a moment, and then, fierce and loud came the cries of the people of Golden Gulch.

"After him—tar an' feather him!" shouted one man.

"We won't stan' fer bein' talked ter like thet!"

"Who's he, anyway—wot es his game?"

"Don't stan' still like logs—git arter him—he's sneaked for ther hotel."

But Newton was out of the way. He had taken advantage of the darkness and the condition of the crowd to make his escape.

CHAPTER XX.

FORBEARANCE PAYS DIVIDENDS.

That Craig Newton had figured correctly the workings of the minds of the men of Golden Gulch was shown early the next morning. Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and the baron, having breakfasted, were seated in front of the hotel when the tall man came out, looking, as usual, as though he had enjoyed a good night's rest, and the cares that might come during the day did not worry him at all.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said.

"You are going to take your customary day in the solitude of the forest?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Most assuredly. And if I am followed, I shall be greatly surprised. I'll go get my horse."

Presently Newton reappeared, mounted as he had been the day before, his saddlebags bulging as usual. He smiled brightly as he passed the pards.

"I shall probably go to the same place where I was yesterday," he called back. "If any one inquires for me, tell them that I would be glad to see them—if they are fond of music and poetry."

He was off up the trail, and Buffalo Bill watched to see whether or not another band would start out after the man.

Though there were several on the street, all of whom seemed to see Newton as he rode away, and

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though there were many frowns sent in his direction, no horsemen appeared, and the scout felt that the man would have the day to himself, unmolested.

The day passed without the reappearance of the tall man. Supper over, Buffalo Bill, more than half unconscious of the direction he was taking, strolled away from town in the direction of the trail over which Newton would return. He had no thought of spying on the man in his mind, but he was abstracted and thoughtful, and naturally he turned in the direction whence would come the man of whom he had been thinking.

It was dark before the scout thought of retracing his steps. He did not imagine that the tall man had entered the town from another direction, but he had walked some distance that day, and was quite ready to rest.

Just as he turned toward the town once more, his ear caught the sound of hoofbeats on the trail, and presently a horseman was beside him, peering down at him through the darkness. The scout's gun was covering the man in a second, but the laugh that came assured him that this was no highwayman.

"I thought I recognized you even in the darkness," said Newton, for he it was. "Out for your evening stroll, as usual?"

"A little earlier than usual," replied Buffalo Bill, replacing his gun in his belt.

"I'm not as late as I was last night," continued the tall man, "but I guess I had better hurry, or I won't

get anything to eat. I didn't cook myself much of a lunch, and I'm hungry."

"I'll be at your performance," called the scout after Newton, as the latter rode on.

At that moment Buffalo Bill started, turned, and again drew the weapon that had saved him from death many times. He had felt a hand upon his arm, and now he saw the form of an Indian standing before him.

"How," muttered the red man.

"How," replied Buffalo Bill. "You want speak to me?"

"Pa-e-has-ka Indian's friend," came the guttural tones.

"When red man good—yes."

"Pa-e-has-ka this Indian's friend."

The king of scouts came closer to the redskin, and now he recognized him as one of the three he had set free after they had attacked the baron. There were no signs of liquor about him, and his face was serious as he stood waiting before him.

"Pa-e-has-ka know this Indian," said the scout, after a moment.

"Indian on warpath—this dark—come here—white man look out—Pa-e-has-ka know now."

The scout's face became deeply lined as he heard the few short words that meant so much—so much that was terrible.

He seized the Indian and came close to him.

"Indian come here this night—this dark—to Golden Gulch?"

"This dark—here—now Pa-e-has-ka know."

He started back as though to leave the scout, but Buffalo Bill held him fast.

"How many Indian—all?—all come?" he asked quickly.

"Mebbe all—mebbe not all—mebbe part. Indian go. He be find—then burned—other Indians not know."

Now the king of scouts let go his hold on the red man, and for a moment his mind was full of pictures that were horrible to contemplate. If the Indians were started out on the warpath, the suffering and tragedies that would follow were appalling to think of.

As the red man disappeared from view, Buffalo Bill turned and started on the run for town.

"At least they will find us prepared," was his thought.

Craig Newton had just mounted his platform when Buffalo Bill arrived, and the crowd was larger than ever; brought there, in spite of themselves, by the attraction the man had and by curiosity to see how he would treat them.

Newton had not opened his lips, and the scout did not wait for him to do so. He dashed through the crowd that surrounded the platform, and with one leap was upon it by the side of the tall man. A murmur of surprise arose as the scout was recognized, but the murmur died out as Buffalo Bill's words came strong and clear from his lips.

"Men," he said quickly, "forget everything except your homes. The Indians are out and will be here to-

night. When they will come I don't know—but they will be here before morning. You have no place where you can all get together for protection, and so each must take care of his own home. There may not be many of them—it has been a long time since there has been a general uprising—but get to your homes. Luckily most of the houses are clustered. Those of you who live far from any neighbor had better come into town with your families. Spread the news—and go—remember what an Indian fight means—and stand together.”

No word was spoken. Buffalo Bill had said the Indians would be there, and no man doubted his word or his reliability. In a moment the street was full of men running in the direction of their homes. The lights, which had so lately shone down upon many interested, though sullen, faces, now blazed, deserted, lighting only a wooden platform.

Buffalo Bill hurried to the hotel, where preparations were being made for protection. He left here, and spent the next hour passing from house to house, making suggestions and bringing courage to many.

It was not until quiet had been restored and the town had assumed its customary appearance, that the scout was again at the hotel with his pards, Pawnee Bill and the baron.

Before many minutes had passed, they heard, coming from the end of the street, the horrible war cry of the red men—and the fight was on.

All was excitement inside the hotel. The fact that

they did not know how many Indians were attacking the town, made the situation all the more thrilling on account of the uncertainty. The whole tribe might be down there whence came the noise, or only a few of the red men.

Pawnee Bill was at the side of the king of scouts the moment they heard the sounds that seemed so terrible.

The door of the hotel was open, ready, however, to be closed and barred the moment it became wise, but now through it they could hear the shouts of the attacked, and the cries of consternation from the attacking red men.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill darted forward. He had heard the signal that had been arranged, and now, above the din caused by the fight at the end of the street, the voice of the king of scouts could be heard.

“At them,” he shouted, and then, turning for an instant to Newton, he spoke quickly. “Now see what you are made of,” he called. “Do what you can to drive those red men back—and things may go easier with you.”

From the saloon across the street poured fifty men, and, following Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, they rushed in the direction of the fight, their voices raised in exultant shouts.

“At them—at them,” was the cry.

“Beat them back!” shouted one of the party.

In a few seconds the white men were in the midst of the fray. It was impossible to tell how many there were of the Indians—they seemed to be everywhere,

fighting with a savage ferocity that was wonderful even in them.

Buffalo Bill was all over the place, and wherever his strides carried him, there was consternation and death for the savages. His gun spoke, and his knife rendered many a red man helpless to battle against the whites.

Pawnee Bill was a tower of strength. The longer he fought, the more he wondered at the manner in which the savages were conducting themselves. It seemed as though they were fighting at random, under no leadership, but thirsting for blood.

And the baron! With his queer expletives and devious thrusts, he was doing his share in the fight. The force that had been placed at that end of the town to meet the first attack had been able to hold its own, and the leader of the whites there had given the signal to Buffalo Bill in the hope that they would be able to stop the red men before any real damage was done to the town. And it looked now as though the whites were in a fair way to succeed in this.

The darkness hampered all—the reds as well as the whites, and there was some danger in using firearms in a battle of this sort. The king of scouts, therefore, resorted to his gun as little as possible.

He had just struck to the ground a tall Indian with a fierce face, and had turned to meet the attack of another, when, in the light of a blazing torch, he saw something on the ground that caused him to turn from the second Indian, and, head down, rush forward into the very midst of the battle.

Then he stopped, made a lunge with his knife, piercing the arm of an Indian who was just about to bring his own weapon down into the heart of a man lying prostrate, and seized the body from the ground. Back into the darkness he dashed with his burden and placed the man behind a small shanty. A voice came from the ground, and Buffalo Bill smiled—happy to hear the firm words.

"I'm all right, Buffalo Bill," said the man. "I was just knocked out—dead to the world for a minute. Now back at them."

"Wild Bill!" exclaimed the king of scouts. "I thought that you were dead."

"Not on your life—but I would have been if I hadn't been lucky enough to have you there to pick me up. Back at them."

"How do you come to be here?"

"Old Nomad, Little Cayuse, and I met an Indian a little while ago. He seemed to know that we were friends of yours and suggested, in his Indian way, that you might be needing us. We hiked here just in time to get into this lovely little mess. Knew you were here, anyway, and wanted to see you, but didn't know that you wanted us as badly as this."

"So the others are here?"

"Somewhere—we may run across them out there in the place where things are doing."

"The same Indian that told you, told me—and we were ready for them," exclaimed Buffalo Bill, as he and his pard, Wild Bill, of Laramie, darted out and again were in the thick of the battle.

So successful had been the arrangements that the scout had made, that the fight did not last long. In a short time the ground was covered with the bodies of wounded Indians, with here and there a white man. But before the end came, the king of scouts saw a great deed. A white man was hard pressed by two savages. They were a bit apart from the rest, and it looked as though the last day of the white man had come, when suddenly, from out of the crowd, darted a tall figure. He held neither gun nor knife in his hands, but those hands were not powerless. Both fists were clenched, and, in the flickering light of one of the few torches, the scout saw both arms fly forward—saw the two Indians pitch to the ground on their faces, and then saw the two white men, now possessing the upper hand, make prisoners of the reds.

The way in which the thing had been done—the attacking of two armed savages by an unarmed man, made the scout's heart beat with admiration. And the white man who had done this thing was the tall man—Craig Newton.

Things happened quickly now. The Indians, seeing that they were completely overcome, began to retreat, doing a most unusual thing—leaving their dead to be cared for by the whites—and soon all the unharmed reds were lost in the forest that bordered the trail to their reservation. Many of the whites tried to follow them, but it was useless to try to accomplish anything, and they straggled back into town one by one.

By the light of the torches the red men were cared for, and in an hour after the first cries had been heard, the town of Golden Gulch was quiet once more.

The king of scouts, Pawnee Bill, and the baron had escaped without injury, but Wild Bill Hickok was hurt more than he was willing to admit. Old Nomad and Little Cayuse had slight wounds, but; when they all assembled at the hotel, the injuries were temporarily forgotten in the pleasure of the reunion of the pards.

Greetings and congratulations over, Buffalo Bill stepped outside the hotel and began to walk up and down. He took from his pocket the small object he had picked from the ground the day before, near the spot where Craig Newton had talked the Golden Gulch citizens to sleep, examined it in the light coming from the window, and then resumed his walk.

Presently he reëntered the hotel, joined Pawnee Bill, and then motioned to Newton.

"Newton," said the scout, "would you please come with me to my room? I have something to say to you."

Surprised, the black-haired man rose and accompanied the pards to Buffalo Bill's apartment, where they seated themselves—all save the scout, who walked up and down the room as he spoke.

"I knew from the first—or was pretty sure, Newton," he began, "that your business was a blind for something else."

Newton started to his feet, but the scout raised his hand—a gun ready in it.

"You must listen," he went on. "The fact that

you made it plain that you were in the habit of disappearing each day told me that you might be doing that for the purpose of covering up your real purpose. The first day out you expected—you hoped that you would be followed, and you filled your saddlebags with food so that we would see that they were stuffed, and so that you could stuff them every day, if you wanted to—but not with food—without exciting comment.”

The tall man was leaning forward now, his head in his hands.

“Then, after things had gone as you intended, you made the people here ashamed to follow you, and you felt free to carry on your business as you wanted to. You were willing to give away a few dollars in town, if only your real business should not be suspected.”

A murmur came from between the tall man's hands as the scout went on.

“There are many things about you that I like, and that I believe are good. One part of you is good—the part that made you anxious to get into the fight to-night, for instance. As you sit there now, thinking of the wrong you have done, you are penitent. You realize that you might have been the cause of the massacre of many innocent people—women and children as well as men. It is that in you that makes me hope that, after to-night, you will change that—business of yours. Perhaps for the first time you realize what sort of trouble you may cause. I did not guess what your purpose was at once, but this little thing, and the sight of the Indians fighting to-night, has made me

pretty certain now what you were doing—what, in all probability, you have been doing against the law of the land for some time. It may be hard to prove against you, but I believe that we can do it—unless you are honest enough to confess.”

The scout took from his pocket once more the little article he had examined earlier in the evening and held it before the tall man.

“We found some Indians in the woods a day ago. There were three of them, but there had been four, and one had disappeared. It is my belief that, either by chance or by previous arrangement, that Indian met you while the men of Golden Gulch were sleeping. It is my belief that through him you carried on your terrible business. The Indians on the reservation were uneasy. You—with your business, came as the final straw. For to-night, here in this town, the Indians who were fighting against us were drunk—drunk with the whisky that you carried in your saddlebags to-day and sold to them—and that whisky of yours was the cause of the attack to-night. They had talked it over, but they decided to go on the warpath when they were filled with your whisky—if I can give it that name. This little article that I found there on the hill where you spoke to the Golden Gulch men is a cork—a cork smelling of whisky. Perhaps it came from a bottle you gave or sold to the Indian you met there. Never mind about that, and never mind how I reached the conclusion, but now I accuse you, Craig Newton, of selling whisky to the Indians against the law, and of being the cause, or partial cause, of the attack to-night.

It rests with you whether or not I shall hand you over to the authorities, or whether you will confess. If you listen to the good part of yourself, you will confess—and, after paying whatever penalty the law imposes, you will become the sort of man you are capable of being."

There was an intense silence in the room, and then, pale of face, but determined in expression, Craig Newton rose and faced the king of scouts.

"It began when you talked to me there in the woods," he said. "I got to thinking about the kind of thoughts that filled my head—to the exclusion of others. I want to change them—and I'm going to. The sight of the fight to-night was the final straw. I realized my part in it, and it seemed to me that I must fight—fight against myself and against the Indians whom I had made crazy with my stuff. I will confess to breaking the law. But I shall carry on this business no longer."

"I believe you," replied Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XXI.

QUEER ACTIONS.

One morning, some weeks later, Buffalo Bill pulled his blanket more closely around him and opened his eyes. Pawnee Bill lay near, his feet to the camp fire—his eyes closed.

It was very early in the morning, and the two pards had slept at the edge of the forest, some distance from the nearest town.

Presently Buffalo Bill saw that something had wakened the other, but both lay quiet, thinking.

Presently, silhouetted against the sky, came a figure—gliding, silent and slow, toward the two scouts.

At first sight one would have thought that it was some great animal, but as it approached, the figure straightened up, and in a moment took the outlines of the form of a man.

He came close to the now smoldering fire, and for a long time looked down on Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill. A strange look was in his eyes, and his hands twitched nervously.

The two scouts had fallen asleep.

Presently the man turned away from them—still making no sound. For a few paces the stranger advanced toward the rising sun—then he stopped again and retraced his steps, and again stood over the sleepers.

As the light grew, and as the man made no further move, it might be seen that his head was incased in a cloth—a cloth covered with blood. He wore no hat, and his hair hung down, saturated with his own blood. His face was very pale, in spite of the coat of tan, and his eyes were intent upon the men there on the ground.

Suddenly, while the newcomer was still in his strange position, Buffalo Bill opened his eyes, and at the same moment Pawnee Bill awakened. The king of scouts did not move, but looked up questioningly. Pawnee Bill, however, started immediately to his feet.

But the newcomer remained as he was—looking down at the scout.

"Wild Bill!" cried Pawnee Bill. "What——"

"Wait!" ordered the king of scouts. "This is no game of Wild Bill's. Wait a moment—perhaps he is——"

Then the man who had come upon the pards in this strange manner sank to the ground.

"I've got to eat," he muttered.

With a quick glance at Pawnee Bill, the king of scouts jumped up and added more wood to the fire. Coffee was boiling in a moment, and some bacon sizzling over the fire. Pawnee Bill had not taken his eyes from Wild Bill, but the latter was now resting back on the blanket Buffalo Bill had thrown beside him.

"What is it?" asked Pawnee, as the king of scouts approached. "That is Wild Bill, of Laramie, all right—but—is he crazy? Why doesn't he talk to us? What is the matter with him?"

The scout was examining Wild Bill's head now, and his face bore a relieved look.

"It's plain to be seen that he's hurt," he responded, "and I am glad to say that it's nothing serious. Probably some knock over the head that has taken his memory away for a little while. He'll come around all right."

"But doesn't he know us?"

"I doubt it."

Now Buffalo Bill was taking something from one of his saddlebags that lay near the fire, and presently he replaced the bloody bandage with a fresh one, after cleansing the cut which appeared on the forehead of the Laramie man. All through the operation, painful as it might have been, Wild Bill had remained motionless, but when it was finished, and the scout brought the hot coffee, Hickock's eyes opened, and he stared at the pards with no recognition showing on his face.

He seemed to know what the coffee was for, as he took it from the scout and appeared to relish the stimulant.

"I never saw him like that," muttered Pawnee.

Wild Bill suddenly began to laugh. It was not a natural laugh, and his eyes, though they looked straight at Buffalo Bill, did not hold a natural expression.

"I tell you, boys," cried the Laramie man, "I was never so hungry in my life. A bit more of that great stuff, if you please. Let me see—it's bacon, ain't it?"

The king of scouts served him again, and Wild Bill swallowed the bacon as though he had had nothing to eat for a week. When Buffalo Bill spoke, it was in

a perfectly natural voice, as though everything was all right and nothing strange had happened.

"I guess you've had a pretty hard time, friend," he said to the Laramie man.

"Great game!" replied Wild Bill. "But it ain't finished yet. You are good to a stranger—much obliged."

"So you've got something to do yet, Bill Hickok," said Pawnee Bill, "and want us to help you, perhaps?"

The Laramie man looked intently at his pard for a moment.

"I don't know why you call me Bill Hickok," he said presently, "though I know the fellow—a worthless sort of a chap, ain't he?"

"Friend of ours," put in the scout.

"I believe," whispered Pawnee Bill, "that this is one of Wild Bill's jokes. He knows us, all right, and is just pretending to be out of his mind."

"All right," responded Buffalo Bill, "but you're wrong. Do you think that Bill is a good enough actor to fool us—when we have known and lived with him for so long?" Then he turned to the Laramie man once more.

"We haven't got anything to do just now," he said, "and we're always ready for a little excitement. Tell us about your game, and perhaps we'll join you in it."

The Laramie man looked first at the king of scouts, and then at Pawnee Bill—the two best pards he had in the world—and there was doubt in his eyes.

"This here's a particular sort of a game," he responded. "I ain't in the habit of trustin' strangers—but you look all right. Wait a little while till this here

breakfast digests. I'm not very spry just now—I'd like a little rest."

"Go as far as you like!" exclaimed the scout. "We'll be here, ready to hear what you've got to say when you wake up."

Again the strange light came in Wild Bill's eyes, and again he laughed.

"I wouldn't go to sleep and let two strangers watch me if I had my valuables about me. But I ain't got any—and—I want the rest."

His eyes closed, and in a moment he was asleep.

In silence, Buffalo Bill and his pards ate their breakfast while Wild Bill slept. When they had finished, they resumed the scrutiny of their friend.

Presently the Laramie man opened his eyes. He raised his hand quickly to his head; then he sat up, an expression of pain on his face. And there was wonder in his look.

"Well, pards," he exclaimed, "things are pretty hazy in my mind! But I'm glad to see you."

"And I can tell you," cried Pawnee Bill, "that we're glad to see you yourself again!"

"Perhaps I am myself," muttered Hickok, with a grim smile, his hand still pressed to his head, "but I feel as though I was some one else—some one that had been on a little spree and ended up with a terrible head. When did I arrive on the scene? It's a long time since I——"

He stopped in a dazed sort of way, as though trying to remember just what had happened.

It did not take Buffalo Bill long to let the Laramie

man know about his waking up and finding him standing by the camp fire, and the scout explained to Wild Bill what he thought had happened to him.

"But," exclaimed Pawnee, "you are all right now and can tell us everything that happened!"

Wild Bill shook his head.

"I ain't so sure about that," he muttered. "I remember a lot of things, but if I've been out of my head, how do I know whether what I remember is right or not?"

"I wonder," mused Pawnee Bill, "who was good enough to put that bandage on your head? I mean the bandage that you wore when you came here."

"Some kind-hearted Indian," suggested Wild Bill ironically.

"It is quite probable," said Buffalo Bill, "that Bill knew enough instinctively to take care of himself."

"I suppose," said Wild Bill, "that you both think that you've seen all the Indians in these parts?"

"Perhaps not all," said the king of scouts, "but I don't believe that there are many that we haven't seen at one time or another."

"That's what I always thought," the Laramie man continued, "but I've changed my mind. I don't mean to say that I saw new Indians like the ones we're used to seeing—I mean some that aren't any more like the reservation reds than Pard Cody is like—well, Little Cayuse, for instance."

"You saw Indians—what tribe?"

"That gets me—Sioux, I guess. At least, they looked

as much like the Sioux as anything—but they didn't look much like the Sioux that we're used to seeing."

"You mean," said Buffalo Bill, "that the ones you saw were more like the original Indians—wild, and all that?"

"It's just what I mean," retorted Wild Bill. "I haven't had much experience with the old savages—the Indians nowadays aren't very fine specimens. But I can tell you that, for downright savageness—fierceness—dignity, and everything that we know of the old ones, the band I saw takes the cake. I tell you, pards, they were wonderful—the finest specimens you ever saw—and they haven't ever lived on any reservation, or I'm a liar."

Pawnee Bill looked at the king of scouts and shook his head.

"I think, Cody," he said, "that you were right when you told Bill Hickok not to try to tell us what he had seen for a little while yet. I think that he's——"

"All right—all right!" muttered Wild Bill, getting a bit nettled that Pawnee Bill should think that he was mistaken in what he was so sure he had seen, "but I tell you this: I'm going to see those Indians again if it takes me a year—and I'm going to find out all about them."

"Tell us about them," said Buffalo Bill quietly. "The possibility is interesting, anyway—and I believe that you were all right at the time—perhaps there are things about this country that we do not know, wise as we consider ourselves."

"Thanks for those few kind words," replied Wild

Bill. "You know it was several days ago that we separated?"

"Yes, you and the baron went off together to do a bit of investigating—wasn't it about his mule?"

"Yes. His mule got lost and he got me to go with him and see if I could get the beast back. The baron was sure that no one had stolen the animal, for he has great respect for the brute's hind feet.

"I guess the big thing happened about midnight," continued the Laramie man. "It seemed as though the woods and the ground was like nothing I had ever known. Suddenly—remember it was terribly dark—when I was just about to get down and make the night there—I saw a big light just over the rise of ground—a lot of rock in front of me, where the trees didn't grow. In the center of the clearing, in a circle of light, stood a gang of red men the—well, I've tried to describe them to you. It seemed as though they had come from another world—their faces were as plain as day—and such faces they were! Say, pard Cody, I just can't make you understand. They were busy with some feast or something, and—and—well, there was blood enough to satisfy anybody. I crept forward, leaving my horse—"

"Just like you!" exclaimed the scout.

"And I got close enough to make sure that they weren't like any Indians I had ever seen. Then, just as I was turning around to get back to my horse, there came the blow on my head. I hadn't heard anything, and I hadn't seen anything, but I can tell you that I felt something then—and the next thing I remember

was waking up here and looking up at you, pard Cody, and at you, Pawnee Bill. You can say anything that you want to, and you can think that I have dreamed all this, but I tell you it's the truth."

There was a moment's silence while Buffalo Bill was deep in thought.

Then Pawnee Bill made a suggestion.

"You might have fallen from your horse and got the blow."

"I wasn't on the horse."

"How many Indians were there?" queried Buffalo Bill.

"Half a dozen, but they looked like twenty—and I bet there was more savagery in them than in twenty ordinary Indians."

The king of scouts began to walk up and down, and the Laramie man watched him closely to see what sort of an impression his tale had made upon Buffalo Bill.

"I just couldn't take my eyes off them," said Wild Bill. "All I can say is that it was wild country and there were a lot of rocks. The light, of course, came from a fire."

"And the—blood?"

"From what they were eating."

"Ah," exclaimed the king of scouts, "we'll put any idea out of our heads that they were eating anything but animals—not human animals, either! If we have discovered something—or, rather, if you, Wild Bill, have discovered something that the authorities don't know about, it is our duty to investigate and give the

information to the people at Washington. It will be pretty hard for you to find your way back to that place from here."

"I couldn't do it to save my life," replied the man of Laramie.

"We will have to go to Golden Gulch and get a horse for you and then to the place from where you started. You will be able to travel the same course as you took with the baron, and in that way find the spot where you saw the strange Indians?"

"Of course I can do that. But probably we won't have to go to all that trouble. I can hit our former trail and go on from there to the place where the baron and I parted company."

CHAPTER XXII.

UNPROVOKED VIOLENCE.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill set about getting their camp outfit together preparatory to leaving. Their horses were untethered and saddled, and Wild Bill informed that, owing to his injured condition, they would make him take turns riding till they were able to secure a mount for him.

"We will have to go to Golden Gulch, anyway," said the king of scouts, "for there is no place nearer than there where we will be able to get another horse."

They figured that Wild Bill must have been out of his head for nearly forty-eight hours, as he and the baron had been traveling two days before the Laramie man had met with his misfortune.

The morning was now well advanced, and the country through which they rode very beautiful. It was not long before they struck the trail leading to the Indian reservation—which they knew well.

"I am thinking of Craig Newton," said Pawnee Bill, with a smile, when they had reached this part of their journey.

"Naturally," replied Buffalo Bill. "He used to come up this trail and talk poetry—when he wasn't selling whisky to the Indians."

It was at that moment, just as they were in the middle of the narrow pass, that Buffalo Bill dropped to the ground.

"Look out!" he cried, as he crawled to one side of the trail, seeking shelter behind a loose boulder.

The others had seen and heard just a moment after the keen instincts of the scout had warned him, and now there came to the three pards the sounds of three shots. And those shots had been fired from up the trail.

"Ready, when I give the word!" said the scout quickly, as he was joined by his pards behind his temporary and precarious shelter. "We'll make a dash and get them—we must look into this."

Their guns were in their hands now. But they were useless. The friends could not shoot to any advantage, as the smoke from the guns of the attacking party was too uncertain to tell of the whereabouts of the enemy.

The moment Buffalo Bill saw that his companions were prepared for the sally, he darted forward in the direction whence had come the shots, taking care, however, to lead the way from one boulder to another, so that they would not be compelled to expose themselves needlessly.

The shooting continued. But so quick were the dashes of Buffalo Bill and his pards that no bullet found a resting place in flesh. Once the bandage worn by Wild Bill was grazed, but the Laramie man merely laughed and pressed on.

Now they had passed out of the ravine and were at a place where the trail was bordered by great trees—it ran directly through the heart of the forest. And here their work was comparatively easy. They sep-

arated, and, guided by the shots that they heard now and then, they dashed after the men who had fired upon them so suddenly and with no apparent reason.

Buffalo Bill was far ahead of his companions, and once he caught sight of the form of a man darting backward through the trees. It was the only time he had seen one of their adversaries, and the king of scouts was determined to make the most of the chance that had come to him.

Forgetting caution, he dashed on ahead. Tree after tree he passed, refusing to stop in the shelter of a great trunk—and always he tried to catch another glimpse of the man he had seen. The bullets whizzed past him, and he could hear the thud of some of them as they were embedded in the bark of the trees.

The shots came less often now. Evidently the pursued were beginning to fear that they would not be able to make their escape if they continued.

A determined look came to the clear eyes, and Buffalo Bill redoubled his speed, now, owing to the infrequency of the shots, paying less attention than ever to his own protection.

Suddenly there came a final shot. The man Buffalo Bill had seen, and on whose heels he was pressing so close, had determined to stop and make a desperate effort to get the king of scouts. This Buffalo Bill knew from the fact that the flash and smoke came from behind a tree quite close to him.

Then, from other portions of the wood, came the sound of other shots. But the scout had one purpose

in mind, and one only—to capture the man who had fired upon him and who was so near to him now.

He made a quick detour to the right—back again, and then, in a wonderful burst of speed, passed around the tree from behind which had come the shot, and saw, just disappearing into the underbrush beyond, the tall form of an Indian.

The king of scouts was after him in a second, his knife in his hand, ready for hand-to-hand conflict if it were forced upon him. And that last burst of speed had brought him to his quarry. The Indian, hoping that the scout would plunge over his body, and that he would thus have Buffalo Bill at a disadvantage, had dropped to the ground.

But Buffalo Bill's mind had worked faster than that of the Indian. He had figured on this very move, and was ready for it. He dropped, therefore, onto the prostrate form of the red man, and in a second had wrenched the revolver from the Sioux's hand.

Then, when he had the man in his power, his first thought was for his companions.

"I've got one!" he shouted. "Don't run any risks—one will give us the information we want!"

Wild Bill Hickok's voice came back:

"Keep him—keep him, I've lost mine—fool—I'm rotten!"

But the tall Indian, even though he was now unarmed, was no easy prey. Buffalo Bill could have easily driven his knife into the heart of the man, but nothing was farther from his thoughts. He dropped his gun and raised one powerful fist.

"Pa-e-has-ka strike," he said to the man. "Indian give up."

"Pa-e-has-ka kill," came the guttural reply. "Indian no give up."

Again the red man began his struggles, and now he managed to deal the scout a blow on the head. Buffalo Bill's eyes flashed.

"Pa-e-has-ka kill—for a little!" he cried, as the two powerful men struggled in each other's arms. Scorning to take advantage of the Indian's unarmed condition, the king of scouts, with one great effort, threw the red man from him, and, as the latter was about to rush at him, Buffalo Bill dealt him a blow on the jaw that felled him to the soft ground. It was the work of but a moment to whip a thong about the Indian's wrists and ankles and to drag him clear of the underbrush. There he lay, unconscious, while the scout called again to his pards:

"Here—have you lost the others?"

Pawnee Bill appeared at that moment, a slight cut on one cheek. He looked down at the prostrate Indian, then at Buffalo Bill.

"It is always so, Cody," he said. "We fail where you are successful."

"Forget that!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "In what direction did the others go—perhaps it isn't too late to get them yet."

The Indian was bound to a tree, and Pawnee Bill and his pard, joined later by Wild Bill, spent a long hour in trying to find the tracks of the others—if there were others. But here even the scout's skill was

unavailing, and they returned to the place where they had left the one Indian whom they had captured.

The man was conscious now, and his sullen face told very plainly the anger he felt at having been unsuccessful in his attack.

Buffalo Bill stood near him and spoke with dignity:

"You shoot Pa-e-has-ka—why?"

Sullen silence on the part of the red man.

"Pa-e-has-ka friend to good Indian," continued the scout.

Buffalo Bill stooped and examined the feet of the tall Indian, while the others looked on in wonder.

"We'll just take him along with us," said the king of scouts. "There is no use in trying to get anything out of him, but I want to have him where I can lay my hands on him."

"He's merely one of the reservation Indians," commented Wild Bill Hickok.

"Right you are," was the scout's reply. "Nevertheless we'll take him to Golden Gulch with us and put him in jail there for safe-keeping."

The Indian's ankles were unfastened and he was freed from the tree. Then they started back for the trail. The horses had not wandered far, and the Laramie man was now quite willing to ride Pawnee Bill's horse. During the chase, Wild Bill had forgotten that he was wounded, but now it was all he could do to mount his horse. Pawnee Bill and the Indian walked, while Buffalo Bill and the Laramie man rode the two steeds.

When they had reached the place where the two

pards had camped for the night, Buffalo Bill asked Pawnee Bill and Wild Bill to remain in the trail and guard the Indian, while he himself took one of the horses and rode back to the camp fire, not far distant.

Arrived there, the king of scouts made a careful examination of the surrounding ground. In places it was quite soft, and there were certain marks that seemed to interest him very much. He spent half an hour over them, and then returned to his companions on the trail.

They then started once more for town, the sullen Indian a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN INTERESTING MEETING.

It was well into the afternoon by the time Buffalo Bill and the others reached Golden Gulch.

They rode up to the hotel and had their horses attended to, and Buffalo Bill took the Indian prisoner inside. His appearance excited a great deal of comment on the part of those who had seen the party enter town.

The prisoner was taken care of, and Wild Bill arranged with the proprietor of the hotel to let him have a horse. They were waiting while the animals were fed and while something was being prepared for themselves, when the scout, standing in front of the hotel, noticed a great commotion far down the street.

Men were running from the saloon across the way, and all interest seemed to be centered in a solitary horseman who had just entered the town and who was making his way toward the hotel.

Men and boys ran along beside the stranger as he rode down the street, and the calls and shouts they uttered made quite a din. It was Craig Newton.

"Ah," cried one rough-voiced fellow, "you had the nerve to come back here, after all, eh? When did you get out?"

"Nice man!" shouted another. "What hev ye got ter sell now?"

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"We war right arter all!" cried a third. "Faker—faker—bum!"

By this time the man had reached the hotel. But he did not pause to dismount at the front door, riding, instead, to the stable and disappearing inside.

Presently, however, he emerged and made his way with difficulty to the door of the hotel. He mounted the few steps, and there it was that Buffalo Bill greeted him.

"Well," he said, "I'm rather surprised at your coming back here. The people of this town haven't much use for you, you know."

The man smiled at the scout and then glanced with some contempt at the crowd.

"No, Buffalo Bill," he replied, "they have not much use for me, and that is the very reason why I came back. I have as little use for them as they have for me, and I wanted to show them what I thought of them. I'm going to stay here for a while and do as I please.

"You see," continued Newton, in his pleasant voice and with his easy manner, "I had the advantage of being tried before a fair judge. I don't mean that I was tried exactly, as I kept my word with you and pleaded guilty. But I had a fair judge to sentence me, and he let me off with a fine."

"Which you were able to pay?"

"Fortunately, yes. The judge seemed to think I intended to turn over a new leaf."

"Where have you been?" Cody asked, knowing that

some time had elapsed between the time when the man must have been sentenced and this day.

"I can't tell you about that," replied Newton, a frown on his brow. "I've been doing a little investigating on my own account, and it's a secret."

"I beg your pardon," said Buffalo Bill quickly. "I was interested, that is all, and had no idea that there was anything secret about your recent whereabouts."

"Well, there is," returned Newton, with a smile, "and perhaps some day you'll know all about it. But just now I'm not saying a word."

The horses were brought around and preparations made to start, but nature took a hand in things and decided against Wild Bill. He was about to mount the horse that he had secured for the trip, when, without warning, he reeled and fell to the ground. They were unable to revive him, and then it was that the scout discovered that Wild Bill's wound had broken open and was bleeding profusely.

They carried him into the hotel and put him to bed. The town doctor was summoned and reported that Wild Bill ought not to move for a day or two at least. During the visit of the physician, the Laramie man recovered consciousness, and loud were his protests. The trip was thus abandoned temporarily and Wild Bill compelled to take care of himself.

"We'll wait here with you," said the scout to the unhappy man, "and just as soon as you are able to guide us we'll start. It won't be long."

Buffalo Bill saw nothing more of Craig Newton until late that evening, and then the man came out in

front of the hotel, where the scout was sitting with Pawnee. He looked rather tired, as though he had been at work over something that required great concentration.

"Well," he said to the scout, "do you think that I'll have any trouble while I am here?"

"I wouldn't worry about it," was Buffalo Bill's reply. "The citizens of the town seem to have become quite used to your being here. I haven't heard your name mentioned."

Buffalo Bill now left the others because he was interested in something that had attracted his attention about half an hour previous to the appearance of Newton in front of the hotel.

He had seen, standing almost across from the place where he had been sitting, a motionless figure, half concealed by the darkness. The scout felt that the man had been watching him as though waiting for an opportunity to speak to him, and now he wanted to give the person that opportunity if he was right in his surmise.

It was too dark for the scout to get a good look at the man; but, that he was an Indian, Buffalo Bill felt sure. Moving down the street, he kept his eye on the other, and was interested to see that the Indian, after waiting a moment, followed him without hesitation.

When Buffalo Bill reached the end of the street and entered the trail leading to the reservation, he knew that the man was close behind him. On the alert for whatever might happen, the king of scouts halted and sat down beside the trail.

In a moment the figure appeared, coming toward him openly, and Buffalo Bill saw that he need fear no attack.

"Pa-e-has-ka!" muttered the Indian, as soon as he had reached the scout.

Buffalo Bill rose and nodded. The red man was a fine specimen of his race, and stood straight and tall before the king of scouts.

"How," replied Buffalo Bill.

"I speak good, mebbe," continued the other. "I counsel with Pa-e-has-ka."

The scout motioned to the other to seat himself, and the red man obeyed. Though it was dark, the light was sufficient for Buffalo Bill to note the serious expression of the Indian's countenance.

"You followed Pa-e-has-ka," said the scout. "Why did you not speak there in town?"

"I speak alone," was the reply. "Pa-e-has-ka friend of Indian. Pa-e-has-ka speak true. Others I do not know."

"You speak about what—Pa-e-has-ka came here to let you talk. What is it?"

The Indian did not reply at once. He seemed to be considering the language he should use, and the scout thought that the man was evidently the possessor of brain and, perhaps, cunning. He studied him while he waited.

"Pa-e-has-ka come to Gold Gulch to-day?" asked the red man at length.

"To-day," replied the scout.

"Pa-e-has-ka's pard with him?"

"One—two pards."

The Indian inclined his head and relapsed into thought once more.

"But," said the scout, "you tell what you want. Not ask Pa-e-has-ka questions."

"Good Indian," responded the other quickly. "Ask questions—for good."

"You mean that you are asking me these questions because you are friend? There is something to tell?"

"Mebbe. One pard hurt?"

This was getting interesting. The Indian had apparently followed the pards and was aware of their movements. How long had they been under his eye, and what had he judged from what he had seen?

"Come," said the scout sternly, "why you watch pards?"

"Not like man that come here this day—not pard of Pa-e-has-ka," and the Indian frowned.

"You mean Newton—white man who sold whisky to Indians?"

The Indian bowed his head, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"He has nothing to do with pards. Pa-e-has-ka wants Indian to talk straight. Why you watch?"

"To speak—to tell Pa-e-has-ka that white man is no friend to Indian."

The man spoke solemnly, and the king of scouts was impressed by his earnestness.

"Perhaps he is no friend—he did wrong to sell whisky to Indians—but now—is he going to do something now?"

"He has done the thing," responded the red man.

Buffalo Bill remembered the fact that Newton had made a mystery out of his recent actions, and wondered if this Indian had chanced to discover something that was calculated to hurt his people.

"Why do you tell Pa-e-has-ka?" he asked.

"Pa-e-has-ka make Newton go away."

"And keep him from doing something that Indian does not like?"

Another nod from the Indian.

"Tell Pa-e-has-ka what Newton has done."

The Indian shook his head.

"Not tell," he said.

"Then Pa-e-has-ka can do nothing."

Buffalo Bill rose as though to put an end to the interview. He knew the uselessness of attempting to argue with his companion, and did not intend to try to discover by questioning, what Newton was up to or had done. The longer he talked with the Indian, the less he liked his manner, and a suspicion came to him that the man had some ulterior motive in seeking this interview with him.

"Pa-e-has-ka friend to Indian," repeated the red man.

"But not a friend who will drive a white man away because Indian says he is doing something bad, if Indian not tell what that bad thing is."

"Newton steal," muttered the Indian.

"From Indians?"

"Tell no more," returned the other. "Indian ask Pa-e-has-ka to take Newton away. If he not go——"

The redskin made an eloquent gesture, and Buffalo Bill faced him quickly.

"If Indian does wrong—kills," he said, "Indian will suffer. Go back to reservation. Newton will do nothing."

"Indian tell—want to tell. No! Cannot tell."

"I understand that Indian thinks he can't tell," replied the scout. "Pa-e-has-ka talk to Newton—ask him."

"He no tell," was the other's response.

"That's his business," returned Buffalo Bill. "Indians be good, and Pa-e-has-ka will be friend. Indians bad, and Pa-e-has-ka fight them."

The red man bowed once more, and then, with something like a grunt, disappeared into the darkness, up the trail, in the direction of the reservation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ATTACK ON THE JAIL.

Later, that night, Buffalo Bill stood a few moments by his window in his room in the hotel, before striking a light. That window looked out upon a small building, which was not more than fifty yards from the hotel, set a little way back from the street.

Though this building was rough, it had been built of heavy logs and timbers, and it was here that the prisoners were kept. Originally made for other purposes, it had been taken lately by the deputy as a jail. The deputy's cabin was farther up the street, but a watch had been set over the Indian. And now, as Buffalo Bill looked down upon the jail, he wondered if there was any chance that an attempt would be made to get the Indian out. He was aware of the fact that, as a rule, the Indians did not interfere with the operation of the law. But there was something so strange about the events of the last few hours, that the scout felt that almost anything might happen now.

The night had grown darker, and Buffalo Bill could just distinguish the outlines of the building, from which issued no light.

"Prisoner and guard are probably asleep," mused Buffalo Bill, as he looked out into the darkness, "but the place seems strong enough—and the deputy would be careful after what I said to him, to leave a good man on watch."

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In a very few minutes the scout was fast asleep, having moved his bed, however, close to the open window that he might catch any sound from outside.

But it was not a sound that first awakened Buffalo Bill.

Suddenly there came a flash of light from outside his window, and the scout peered into the darkness to watch for a repetition. The light had wakened him—but now all was black once more. He had been unable to place the light exactly, but he knew that it had come from the direction of the jail.

For ten seconds he waited. Then he pulled on his boots—he had lain down fully dressed otherwise—and darted out into the hall, stopping a moment at Pawnee Bill's door.

"Come," was his low-whispered word. But the word was sufficient to bring Pawnee to his side.

Buffalo Bill explained what he had seen, and together the pards dashed down the stairs and out into the deserted street.

They kept close to the hotel, and made no sound.

"It may amount to nothing," whispered the king of scouts, "and it may. Anyway, lie low."

Now they were at the side of the hotel facing the jail. Not a sound was to be heard, and all was darkness about the small building.

A moment they waited—then Buffalo Bill darted across the space intervening between the building that they had just quitted and the other, and in a second was standing close to the wall of the jail, his gun in his hand, his ears alert.

Of a sudden, when it seemed as though there would be no further developments, the king of scouts heard a faint sound coming from around the corner of the jail.

In that direction he made his way, and then, just as he reached the back of the jail, he saw another flash of light, and in that flash the dark figure of an Indian. The light, moreover, did not die out this time, but the flame caught a pile of wood and dried grass that had been placed against the building, and in a moment the scene was illuminated by the light of the fire.

"Here, pard," called Buffalo Bill, as he darted forward toward the Indian.

Pawnee came rushing across the ground and was at the scout's side just as Buffalo Bill grappled with the red man.

And then it was that another Indian joined the group. It was as though he had sprung from the ground, so sudden was his coming, but Pawnee Bill was upon him instantly. A third Indian ran from the protecting darkness, and then a fourth. Four against two, they were, but there was no fear in the hearts of the pards.

As the king of scouts swayed backward and forward in the grasp of his antagonist, he expected each moment to hear the report of a gun, and he was astonished that his adversary did not shoot.

Three of the red men were grappling with the scout, and one powerless in the hands of Pawnee Bill. A lucky blow from the scout's fist freed him from the

clutches of the first Indian he had tackled, and then he saw that the man had no gun.

His own weapon he hesitated to use until it became necessary, and when the first redskin dropped to the ground, he felt that there would not have to be any shooting.

Pawnee Bill now came to the assistance of the scout. A slash from a knife had torn the sleeve of Pawnee's shirt, but he was not harmed. Two Indians were on the ground and two facing the pards, when two more appeared, breathing hard, as though they had been running.

They, too, threw themselves on the white men, just as Buffalo Bill knocked one of the others senseless, and the battle was resumed, the odds now being three to two. The man against whom Pawnee Bill was fighting, was an unusually powerful fellow.

"They have no guns," cried Buffalo Bill. "We must use ours if there are any more of them coming."

The scout now swung his powerful right fist, landed cleanly on the jaw of one of the Indians, and had the satisfaction of seeing him drop to the ground—unconscious.

Behind them the fire blazed. It had caught the little building now, and was crackling against the dry logs. A shout came from within, and the Indians dashed at the pards with fresh strength. Knives gleamed in the yellow light, and dark faces glowed.

"End it—end it!" cried Pawnee Bill, and before his powerful attack another Indian gave way.

The ground was literally strewn with red men, and but two remained to give battle to the white pards.

"All over!" cried the king of scouts, as, at last, he covered the men with his gun.

Now the shouting had increased, and there came running from all directions, men of the town.

"Put out the fire!" ordered the scout as he saw the danger to the building and realized that there were men inside.

But, at that moment, the door of the little jail flew open, and a man appeared, surveyed the scene, and then called to some one inside.

"Come out o' thar!" he shouted.

"Indian tied," was the reply from within.

The guard darted back into the burning building, and in a moment the tall Indian, who had been captured the day before, rushed past Pawnee Bill and the others standing by him, and was all but lost in the darkness.

"Look out for these fellows," shouted Buffalo Bill, as he, too, ran into the blackness beyond the light.

But the Indian was making a noise as he ran over the ground, unfamiliar as it was to him. Once he fell, and he had just regained his feet, when the king of scouts was upon him, pinioning his arms to his sides.

"No use," he said in the red man's ear. "Come back!"

They turned, and the Indian was marched back to the light at the point of the scout's gun.

The fire had been almost extinguished, and it was found that the building had not been destroyed, so

thick were the logs of which it was built. A great crowd had assembled by this time, and there were lanterns and torches. The half dozen Indians whom the pards had overcome, were bound and lying on the ground. One of them had not yet regained consciousness.

After a while the crowd began to disperse, and now for the first time, Buffalo Bill saw Craig Newton. He was looking at the scene with a thoughtful expression on his face.

His eye caught that of the scout and he shook his head.

"Bad business," he muttered as he came to the scout's side.

"Does it make you change your idea about getting away from here?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Not in the slightest. I don't see what I have to do with this."

"It merely shows you that the Indians aren't any too easy to deal with," returned Buffalo Bill, "and that they haven't become exactly civilized yet. Of course they have been guilty of attempted arson."

"I know something about Indians," responded Newton, "but this is the first time I ever knew of their trying to make a jail delivery. I can't understand how they took such chances to save one of them."

"They thought that they weren't taking any chances," responded Buffalo Bill. "They probably counted on being able to fire the jail and get away into the woods. They left the escaping to the prisoner. If I hadn't happened to see the first light, they

might have been successful. If the thing had caught at their first attempt, they would have been far away before I could get out here. But they failed to make the blaze catch and were delayed. It wasn't a very clever scheme."

Having assured himself that the deputy would now make sure of not having a repetition of what might have ended in disaster, Buffalo Bill and his pard returned to their rooms at the hotel.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN OPPORTUNE MEETING.

When Buffalo Bill entered the dining room in the morning, he was astonished to find the Laramie man there before him. Wild Bill's face was pale, but he was determined.

"I knew that the only way I could convince you that I was all right," he said to the scout, "was to be up before you. Anybody that does that must be pretty strong."

"So you are determined to start out to-day?" queried Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and you aren't strong enough to stop me," replied the Laramie man.

Accordingly, preparations for an immediate start were made. And presently the pards started out, heading, at first, up the trail that led to the Indian reservation.

In a couple of hours they left the trail and then were compelled to blaze their way where there was no trail. Progress was slow, as they were compelled to make long detours to pass around ravines and small cañons, and when darkness was almost upon them, Wild Bill was discouraged.

"It seems as though we ought to have come to the trail that the baron and I took by this time," he remarked, as he studied the country around them, "but I don't recognize this place at all."

They followed the Laramie man around the base of a hill and into the woods beyond.

"Have your guns ready!" exclaimed Wild Bill suddenly. "There may be hot work ahead of us."

Presently they reached a flat bit of land, where they could make better progress, and Wild Bill urged his horse forward as fast as possible. In about three minutes they had reached a well-marked trail. The Laramie man turned to the left, swung around a bend, and there, riding slowly forward, were old Nomad and Little Cayuse.

At the sound of the approaching pards, the two turned in their saddles and uttered exclamations of astonishment.

"Get into the woods," cried Wild Bill to old Nomad and the others, "and get ready for an attack!"

Wonderingly, but quickly, they obeyed, and presently the five pards were ready for the expected attack.

"Wot does this here all mean?" exclaimed old Nomad. "Hev ye gone plum' crazy, Wild Bill?"

"It is a bit mysterious," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile. "You had better tell us, while we're waiting, Bill."

"It looks funny to me," agreed the Laramie man, "but I thought that Little Cayuse and old Nomad didn't have long to live."

"You saw them from the top of the hill?" asked the scout.

"I sure did," was the reply. "Didn't you know," he added, turning to old Nomad, "that you were being followed? You don't act as though you knew it."

"Didn't know et," responded the plainsman. "Who war folleyin' us?"

"Three of the most savage-looking Indians I ever saw," replied the man of Laramie solemnly.

"Your Indians?" asked the king of scouts quietly.

"As sure as I'm alive," returned Wild Bill.

"Did they have guns?" queried Buffalo Bill.

"No—bows and arrows."

"Then lead the way—if you can."

At that moment, from quite near them in the trail, came strange, guttural cries. Wild Bill started forward—then halted.

"They've seen us," he cried. "Do you hear that?"

"Were they mounted?" asked the scout quickly.

"No."

"Then we'll leave our horses here and after them on foot," returned Buffalo Bill, as he darted from their hiding place and in the direction whence had come the cries.

The other pards were with him in an instant, all rushing down the trail. But presently they halted. There were no human beings in sight, but Buffalo Bill thought that he heard sounds beyond the trail, some distance back in the woods.

He started in that direction, but it was practically impossible to make headway even on foot. Wild Bill and the others were also attempting to penetrate the underbrush and advance in the same direction, but they, too, found progress terribly slow.

They had advanced not more than fifty feet, when Wild Bill uttered a satisfied exclamation.

"Ah!" he cried, "I know the place now. It was here that I was struck—and just beyond there—if we can get ahead, I'll show you—that I saw the Indians before. The baron and I went no farther than this."

It was dark now, and the pards worked very quietly in their attempt to advance. After half an hour, during which time they had heard no more sounds, they confessed themselves beaten by nature.

"We'll just have to wait till morning," said the scout; "and perhaps it's as well. I've seen most of this Western country, but this is about the roughest I've ever run against."

They made their way back to the trail and prepared to make camp.

Buffalo Bill himself took the first watch while the others slept.

Suddenly it seemed to the scout that a sound foreign to those to which he was accustomed, reached his ears. It was as though some one was gently drumming on an instrument of ancient origin.

For a few minutes he listened intently. It came from some distance, and was soothing in its tone.

Buffalo Bill was about to awaken Pawnee Bill and put him on watch while he investigated the sound, when he heard another and more familiar noise. There was some one on the trail quite near them. And the person—or, perhaps, an animal—was moving carefully.

A minute the scout listened. Then the sound came again. But now it was different. The far-distant drumming had stopped, and all was still save for the

faint sound of the thing moving out there on the trail.

Presently the scout heard a long-drawn breath and a movement in the trees quite near him. It was impossible to see a thing, but now the man—Buffalo Bill was sure that it was a man by this time—uttered an unintelligible exclamation.

Now he was sniffing the air.

"Smells our fire," mused the scout. The fire was dead, but a faint smell of it remained.

Words followed.

"Some one been here," said the man aloud. "Gone, though. Dead fire."

The scout now crept close to the speaker and fancied he could see the outlines of the fellow's horse. The sounds that followed were those of one preparing to camp for the night, and Buffalo Bill had no difficulty in recognizing them.

At last, when the scout was quite close, there sprang up a tiny blaze. The man had struck a match, and for a second, while the tiny flame rose from the pipe the man was lighting, his features were thrown into relief.

It was all that Buffalo Bill could do to refrain from exclaiming aloud. For the man was Craig Newton.

"Don't be alarmed," said the scout, rising to his feet and taking his matches from his pocket.

Newton cried out quickly—then, as Buffalo Bill lighted a match, he recognized the scout.

"Well, of all people!" he exclaimed.

"And I might say the same," responded Buffalo Bill. "We seem to be thrown together all the time."

"What——" began Newton.

"When we are a party as we are to-night, we make it a rule to keep a lookout," said the scout. "It was my watch, and I heard you. After the trouble I have been having with the Indians, I thought it was just as well to investigate. They seem to be after me, for some reason."

"You certainly gave me a start," said Newton. "I will join your party, with your permission."

The horse was left where Newton had tethered him, and the scout made the way to his camp. Pawnee Bill had just awakened, and finding that Buffalo Bill was not there, was rousing the other pards, when the king of scouts and Newton put in an appearance.

"I met an old acquaintance who was just making camp for the night," said the scout. "You all know him. Allow me to present Craig Newton."

They were all awake by this time, and low exclamations were uttered.

"Seems to me," said Wild Bill, "that this trail is as bad as Broadway, New York City. They say that you can meet everybody you know there."

"And we've run across three people of our acquaintance here on this trail," explained the scout to Newton. "First, two of our pards, and now you."

"It does seem rather strange," was that person's reply. "But I could explain the meeting with me easily—if I cared to. Perhaps I shall."

"And the meeting with our friends is easily explain-

able," continued Buffalo Bill. "They, like ourselves, are looking, among other things, for a mutual friend."

"I wonder who'll be ther next," muttered old Nomad.

"This isn't a very good time to speculate on that," said Buffalo Bill. "I think that we all need sleep. Let's turn in."

The suggestion was greeted with approval by the others, though Newton's actions seemed strange. He was very thoughtful as he wrapped himself in his blanket, and the scout was more interested than ever to know how it happened that they were continually running into the man, and why he refused to explain his actions.

Soon all was quiet at the little camp. Every eye was closed except those of Little Cayuse, whose turn it was to watch.

It was, perhaps, an hour after the appearance of Newton that the little Piute suddenly sat straight, head bent forward, eyes turning to pierce the darkness of the dark night. For, like Buffalo Bill, he heard the distant drumming, faint and low, but plain. It ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun, and the Indian relapsed into motionlessness once more.

It was then that he was conscious of a movement on the part of Newton. The man was near him, and Little Cayuse's wonderful alertness told him that the man was awake—and listening. Then the white man spoke in a low tone.

"Who's watching?" he asked, so low that his voice did not disturb any of the sleepers.

"Cayuse," responded the little Piute.

"Ah," muttered Newton. "Have you heard anything?"

"The little animals," was the Indian's noncommittal reply.

"Something else," continued Newton. "I may have been asleep—but it seemed to me that I heard a strange sound. Did it reach you—or did I imagine it?"

"Um, mebbe."

"Wake me if you hear it again, will you?" asked the white man.

"Um—mebbe," was all the satisfaction Newton could get from the other.

Craig drew his blanket about him once more, and again all was silent. Little Cayuse kept listening, but not again did that strange sound come to his ears, until when it was almost time for him to wake Pawnee Bill to take his turn at the watch, the little Piute's ears were rewarded.

From the other side of the trail came a sound that broke the silence most decidedly. It seemed as though an elephant was there, trying to make its way through the underbrush.

Little Cayuse was on his feet in a second, darting forward in the direction whence came the sound.

When Little Cayuse had reached the trail, he heard the sound no more.

Little Cayuse now awakened Pawnee Bill.

"Well," asked Pawnee, "heard anything?"

"First drums—mebbe. Like that," replied Little Cayuse. "Then Newton wake and he hear, too."

"Drums?" queried Pawnee. "I guess you were dreaming."

"Drums," repeated the little Indian. "Just now big animal over there—cross trail. Little Cayuse go see."

"Little Cayuse stay here," said Pawnee. "We aren't out hunting, and we don't care how many animals run around here as long as they don't disturb us. Go to sleep! You need it like all the rest of us."

Pawnee Bill composed himself to watch. No sound of drumming came to him, nor did he hear any animal across the trail. All was silent.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GATHERING DATA FOR A BOOK.

Buffalo Bill, as usual, was the first to open his eyes at break of day, and soon the camp was astir.

The little Piute made a fire, and soon coffee was boiling and bacon cooking over it. The wind was coming from the direction in which Wild Bill had said that the Indians had been seen, and Buffalo Bill did not fear that they—if they were there—would smell the odor.

And presently all the pards and Newton were engaged in eating a hearty meal.

"I think," responded Newton, sipping his coffee, "that I am going to tell you all my business. I've been foolish to keep it back so long."

"That sounds like straight talk," replied Buffalo Bill.

"You see," continued Newton, "what Little Cayuse and I heard last night makes me believe that I didn't come out here on a wild-goose chase at all. But I had the foolish idea that I wanted to be the only one that had any knowledge on this subject—I thought it would make that knowledge all the more valuable."

"May I ask," said Buffalo Bill, "if you refer to the sound of drumming that Little Cayuse heard last night?"

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"Yes—that's what has convinced me that there is something doing here."

"I heard the same sound earlier in the night," continued Buffalo Bill. "And where do you think it comes from?"

"I believe that it was made by a band of savages—Indians quite different from those living on the reservation. Indians whom few, if any, white men have ever seen."

"There happens to be one," interposed Wild Bill, "who has seen them."

Craig Newton was intensely surprised at the turn the conversation was taking. He supposed that Buffalo Bill and the pards knew nothing of the existence of any such band, and was correspondingly disappointed when he found to the contrary. He told them, however, that he was getting data concerning the Indians for the purpose of writing a book.

Under Buffalo Bill's direction, all now worked to make the place as safe as possible in case it was needed for a retreat. Fallen trees were moved when possible, and the spot began to take on the appearance of a fort.

The horses were taken back into the woods, and the saddles and the rest of the outfit hidden where others would not be likely to find them.

The six men then gathered together to receive their final instructions from Buffalo Bill, when, suddenly, Little Cayuse darted away from them. Then to their ears came the sound he had first heard. And Little

Cayuse was out there in the woods, determined, this time, to find what was the cause.

Louder than before, the sound came. Branches creaked, and a heavy body seemed to be dragging itself over the ground there beyond the trail.

Then the sound became louder still. The animal had reached the trail at last and was coming toward them.

Buffalo Bill ran forward, and his pards were at his heels, each with his gun in his hand.

The pards looked out onto the trail

There stood Little Cayuse, his arms about the neck of—the baron's mule. And the mule seemed as glad to see the little Piute as the Indian was to see the beast.

It was not until he had eaten his fill and had been watered, that the mule seemed quite himself again. He was taken to the place where the other animals had been fastened, and he looked at those of the horses known to him as though he recognized his old friends.

The final straw came when, looking Buffalo Bill straight in the face for a moment, the mule raised his head and uttered one of his best and most inspiring brays.

Then once again the pards assembled, and Buffalo Bill gave his instructions.

"We've got to watch the trail," he said. "Little Cayuse will have to do that. Then we'll scatter and look for the way into the home of the savages. Wild Bill and I will go together, as he thinks he can find the

place where he was when he saw them before. I will post you. Come! And remember, pards, no one of you is to try to get at the Indians till he has given the signal to the rest. This isn't a matter to be handled single-handed."

The pards were standing at the site of their camp, as Cody gave this warning. The words had no more than left his mouth when he uttered a quick word.

"Drop behind!" he exclaimed.

Quick as a flash his men obeyed him, and then it was that they knew the reason for his command.

From behind a great tree quite near the trail came the sound of a gun, and the smoke rose slowly in the wood. This shot was followed by another and another, and when the pards began to return the fire, smoke was everywhere.

They could not count their adversaries, but from the number of shots fired, it seemed as though there must be more than a score of them.

But behind the breastworks there were six determined men, every one of whom was a good shot. Moreover, Buffalo Bill and his party had plenty of ammunition, and it was to be supposed that, if those of the attacking party were Indians, they would be shy in this respect.

The white men were protected by the fallen trees that they had arranged and by the earth and brush that they had piled up. The fact that they had been standing in plain sight of the Indians when the latter had first fired, explained why the red men had done so.

Evidently they had not made a very careful examination of the ground, and did not know that the whites had a place in which they would be comparatively safe. When they realized this, and the fact that they were doing little damage to their enemies by their fire, they ceased temporarily, and Buffalo Bill and the others could hear loud, guttural shouts exchanged between the Indians.

Moreover, Cody understood from these shouts, though made in the Sioux tongue, that the red men were completely at a loss to know what to do. It was plain, however, that while the Indians remained in their present position, the whites would have little chance of getting across the trail and starting to search for the strange band, which, they were now confident, made its home somewhere in that vicinity.

There was a long lull in the fighting; one of those behind the wall, however, taking an occasional shot at a redskin whenever one would appear.

"Pard," said Buffalo Bill, addressing Pawnee, "you can leave off shooting and keep a watch back of us. I think that they will try to divide their force and to get to our rear, relying on their superior numbers."

And now, as a proof of the scout's foresight, there came a cry from old Nomad, and he dropped his gun and lay stretched on the ground. He had been shot from the rear.

But Pawnee Bill, following the scout's advice, had seen the Indian whose bullet had apparently found its mark, and Pawnee Bill's gun spoke plainly. The red

man threw up his hands and fell forward on his face, one of the bowie man's bullets in his body.

More shouts came from the rear, but the Indians had made the mistake of sending one back there at a time, and the sharpshooters of the little band of white men had been able to pick them off as fast as they found positions in their rear.

The Indians behind had less protection than those in front, as the trees were fewer there, and before the Indians realized their mistake, many of their number were put out of the battle permanently.

Then the portion of the band that held the comparatively safe positions in front, renewed their fire desperately. The cries rose to the sky, and the bullets whizzed over the heads of Buffalo Bill and his pard.

Old Nomad had staggered to his knees and was shooting whenever he saw an opportunity—grim determination expressed on his face.

"How it is?" called Buffalo Bill to him.

"Right es er fiddle," was the firm reply. "I dunno wot knocked me over—fright, I guess."

It had not been fright—far from it, but the old man's wound was not a serious one, and he was now quite able to take care of himself.

The wounded Indians to the rear of the little party were trying to crawl away. Some did not move, and would not move, ever. But the king of scouts saw that it was time to take further action. The Indians would, in time, realize that they could do little against the scout's band, and would draw away. In that case, in all probability, they would seek shelter with the other

savages, and it would be practically impossible for the white men to overcome the combined forces.

"Boys," cried Buffalo Bill, "there can't be more than a dozen of them out there. There are six of us. Nearly half of them are out of business. We'll make a dash for it. Follow me."

With these words the king of scouts, taking advantage of a moment of quiet, vaulted the barrier, and, followed by his pards and Newton, his new friend, rushed into the very midst of the savages.

There they found the red men back of protecting trees—and a terribly surprised lot they were. Poor shots at best, the Indians' aim was bad under the circumstances. Wild Bill's face was grazed by a bullet, and Pawnee Bill felt a sting of lead in his arm. But the others escaped without a scratch in the first sally, and five of the Indians were felled to the ground almost before they realized what had happened to them. And those who fell, were not likely to rise again during that battle.

Now the conflict became a hand-to-hand one. The Indians were apparently out of ammunition, or else feared to fire, for the probabilities were that a bullet would lodge in the body of some friend. So the white men abandoned their guns.

But the fact that there was no shooting, did not make the fight any the less fierce. Red man was grasped by white, and white by red. Knives flashed in the morning light, and were aimed at hearts viciously.

Once in a while one of Buffalo Bill's party would see an Indian crawl away, wounded unto death, but eager

to get a last shot from a safe place. And occasionally, now that the end was so near, a shot would come from a distance. None of these, however, did any damage.

The latter part of the battle was as short as it was fierce. Buffalo Bill had felled three of the red men and was now rushing to the assistance of those who needed it. As one would fall, another would attempt to rise and take his place. But the blows of the white men had been too powerful.

It was with difficulty that the men kept their feet, so many bodies lay on the ground. The knife of one Indian had slashed the shirt of Little Cayuse. But on every occasion when it had seemed as though an Indian was about to pierce the heart of one of the white men, either Buffalo Bill or Pawnee Bill or one of the others would be there to deflect the weapon.

And so the end came. All the Indians, except three, were wounded seriously or put out of business for the time being, and these three surrendered in sullen silence. No longer did the woods ring with the war cry, and even the voices of the white men were hushed. The carnage had been terrible, and Buffalo Bill sincerely regretted the day when chance and the baron's disappearance had made it necessary for him to make the investigation that was now nearing its close.

Not one of Buffalo Bill's party was seriously injured, but the Indians required considerable attention, and the scout did all he could for them. Those who were but slightly wounded, he ordered bound, and those whom attention would help, received it.

"I think," he said, when all was quiet again, and they

had counted twenty Indian captives, "that we shall not have a difficult time after this. If the band that has its home near here were very strong, these men would not have come from the reservation. That they came to protect them is evident. Old Nomad," and the scout turned to the old plainsman, "you had the bad luck to receive the worst injury. You stay here and do what you can for these poor fellows and guard them, while the rest of us will go on and see what we can find."

"Ain't et bad ernuff luck ter git hurt," complained old Nomad, "wi'out bein' made ter stay here an' play nurse?"

"It's hard luck," responded the scout, "but I don't see any way out of it."

Now, among the prisoners, Buffalo Bill recognized the Indian who had followed him and asked him to see that Newton left the country. He had the feeling that the red man was treacherous, but he moved toward him and spoke.

"You lied to Pa-e-has-ka," he said.

The Indian was silent, sullen.

"You said it was to get Newton away that you came to me. You really wanted to find out what I was going to do. You are a bad Indian."

"Can do nothing else," muttered the man. "Big chief give order."

"And you knew that they were going to set fire to the jail," the scout went on. "Now tell Pa-e-has-ka where other Indians are."

But the scout was unable to get the Indian to give away a secret of his tribe, and Buffalo Bill was compelled to give up.

"At last," he said, turning to his pards, "we are ready to search for the baron—and the mysterious tribe."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS TRIBE.

There was no necessity now to leave Little Cayuse on guard over the trail, as old Nomad would be able to give warning of the approach of any more Indians. Moreover, the scout was sure that no more would be sent from the reservation.

All except old Nomad, therefore, started for the trail and took up the search for the pass that would lead them to the home of the strange band. He and Wild Bill went farther up the trail, and Wild Bill was able to find his old trail into the woods. It was not without difficulty that he and the king of scouts made their way up a steep hill and over rough ground to a place where there was a small clearing.

Beyond this clearing the conformation of the ground changed completely. Rocks and bowlders took the place of trees and vegetation.

Suddenly Wild Bill uttered an exclamation.

"Look!" he said, as he picked something from the ground just at the edge of the clearing.

The thing was the Laramie man's hat.

"It was here I lay and looked at the savages," exclaimed Wild Bill, "and the savages were there in that clearing."

"And it is pretty plain to be seen," returned Buffalo Bill, "that their home is somewhere among the rocks that we see in front of us."

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"Then come on—come on!" cried the man of Laramie.

"Remember my orders," returned the king of scouts. "It wouldn't look well for us to disobey them. We'll get the others."

"I'll go!" ejaculated Wild Bill.

He was gone before the scout had a chance to reply, and the others now joined the chief.

Then, low and faint, there came to their ears the monotonous drumming that the scout and Little Cayuse had heard that night. The weird sound gave them a strange feeling, and they glanced quickly at one another.

"Fools," muttered Wild Bill, "they are giving away their hiding place."

"It almost seems," murmured Pawnee Bill, "as though the Fates were helping us to find them."

"It had to come some time," replied Buffalo Bill. "Come!"

They advanced quietly through the clearing, and came to the rocks beyond. Not an opening did they see.

The low drumming continued, and it seemed to come from the earth beneath them. And yet, guided by this sound, they were baffled at every step.

There did not seem to be an opening anywhere.

"I don't wonder," said Wild Bill, "that the savages have the nerve to play their drum. It doesn't look as though we'd ever get in."

But at that moment Little Cayuse grunted, and in a second all the pards were about him.

"He's found it—he's found it!" exclaimed Wild Bill. "Hooray fer Little Cayuse."

And, indeed, the little Piute had made the discovery. There was a slab of rock, seemingly quite like all the rest, but a close examination disclosed the fact that the edges were worn. And after several attempts to move it, the reason for this wearing was discovered. It had often been taken from its place, and now, possibly for the last time, it was moved, and the pards saw before them a long passageway.

This they entered one by one. It was quite dark. The sound of the drumming was louder now, and as the pards advanced, it became more distinct than ever.

Presently, when they were least expecting it, the passageway opened. They had been descending all the time, and now they emerged into an open space, open to the heavens at the top, but walled high with rock. It was an amphitheater, a large one, though its extent could not at first be estimated. But the opening through which the sky could be seen was small, the walls forming a sort of roof.

And in the center of this amphitheater, they saw ten Indians clustered. One was beating a drum while the others were moving about him slowly. They seemed to pay no attention to the newcomers who had stepped back into the passageway.

Never had any of the pards, except Wild Bill, seen anything like the sight before. These Indians were tall and stately, showing great dignity and telling the story of the decay of the present-day red man.

"Now, do you believe me?" asked Wild Bill, in a hushed voice.

"Wonderful!" replied the king of scouts.

"What a story it will make!" came from Craig Newton.

"It seems almost a shame to disturb them," whispered Buffalo Bill.

"I don't imagine that they'll show much fight," said Pawnee Bill.

"But how about the baron?" asked Wild Bill. "I don't see him joining in the festivities."

"These don't look like festivities to me," said Cody. "It seems to me that these men have a sort of premonition that their days here are ended. I don't believe that they will last long on the reservation. See, they are old."

Now the drumming ceased, and the men moved away. Their faces were turned for a moment in the direction of the passageway where the pards were secreted, and then the white men saw that their countenances were sad. The expression on every face told of a great sorrow.

"Yes," muttered Cody, "they know that at last their end is near. They knew that they were seen, and the sound of the fighting was the final straw. They will not be surprised to see us."

And such proved to be the case. As Buffalo Bill and his pards walked forward, covering the savages with their weapons, they evinced no surprise, but stood, mute, as though waiting for the end to come.

And now the pards realized that, though they were

savages of a bygone day, and though the expression on each face was one calculated to inspire fear, nevertheless the men were very old and feeble, though they carried their bodies straight, and though their eyes could flash.

Buffalo Bill spoke to them in the Sioux tongue.

"You will come with me," he said, "to the land that the white man has prepared for you. There you will have land to own. As long as Pa-e-has-ka lives, you will be treated well."

The oldest and tallest of the men stepped forward.

"We will come," he said. "We have expected it—though we have dreaded it. We must go where the white man commands—go there—and pass to the happy hunting ground."

Then, as suddenly as the lightning's flash, a voice was heard.

"Py Yiminy hoorays, if Puffalo Pill yet unt der pards ain't it here come—und dey've pfount my mu-el I pets yer."

Instantly the scene changed. The baron came rushing to them, and was greeted with open arms.

"Yes," said Buffalo Bill, "the mule is safe, but he's a little lame."

"I moost oud it get," cried the baron. "Nopody how to take care off my mu-el knows put me. I moost ged oudt."

And out he did get. It developed that the baron had had chances to escape from the savages, into whose hands he had fallen while searching for his pet, but he had an idea that they had the mule secreted some-

where, and his affection for the beast had compelled him to remain there until he had made sure that they did not have the beast. They had guarded him very carefully, however, and he would have been compelled to take a great risk to effect his escape.

As Buffalo Bill had predicted, the Indians made little trouble, and he took them to the proper authorities, who placed them on the Sioux reservation. There they were treated with the utmost respect by the other Indians.

Investigation proved that Buffalo Bill and Newton had come to the correct conclusion concerning them. They were the last of a tribe, the original Sioux. The men on the reservation had always guarded the truth about them and their hiding place as a sacred secret, a betrayal of which would result in death to the offender.

Craig Newton accompanied the pards and the prisoners to civilization, and not long afterward Buffalo Bill received a copy of the book he had written. It was a masterful history of the Indians of the West.

It was not until the case was finished and Wild Bill and Cody were quite free from worries, that the Laramie man explained why he had been so silent during the last few days.

"I'll tell you," he said; "I hate to bring up post mortems, and there isn't any use in stirring up dead dogs, and I suppose that matter of the old Indian tribe is closed."

"It seems to me," replied the scout, "that there isn't much more to say on that subject."

"There's just one thing I want to ask," continued

the Laramie man, "and that is, was I hit by one of those savages or by an Indian from the reservation? What hit me the night that I saw them for the first time?"

For a moment Buffalo Bill was very grave.

"It may be," he said, "that one of the old fellows hit you, but I have an idea that it was something quite different.

A twinkle came to the scout's eye as the Laramie man waited for him to go on.

"I think, in all probability, that you were kicked by the baron's mule."

That night while sitting in the hotel at Golden Gulch, Cody received a telegram ordering him to report for duty at Fort McPherson. Leaving his friends at the border settlement, the king of scouts set out on a lone trail for the military post.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STRANGE HORSEMAN.

"Pardon me, sir, but who is the chief of this train?" The man who asked the question was a stranger to those of the wagon train.

His tone was courteous, yet commanding, and he had ridden hard, as his splendid horse showed, to overtake the wagon train, the trail of which he had come upon to at once know, as a man of the border, that it was going into certain danger and death if not checked very soon.

The scout had raised his broad sombrero at the sight of ladies in the train, but his question had been addressed to a man of middle age, evidently the one in charge.

In an ambulance, used as a "prairie carriage," sat an elderly female, beyond all doubt belonging to that much-abused class known as "old maids," and also within it was a negress of middle age, and whose inky-black husband was driving the vehicle.

There was a second ambulance, driven by a prairie waif, a boy of fifteen, known as "Pepper," and whom Mr. Markham, the owner of the train, had picked up on the trail westward.

Three large and well-filled wagons, driven by young bordermen, a lot of loose horses and cattle in charge of other men, with Mr. Markham and his really beauti-

ful daughter Madge, both well mounted and attired, completed the outfit thus halted upon the prairie by the unknown and handsome stranger, except the guide, who was not just then with the train.

"I am, sir," said Mr. Markham, in reply.

"I hope, sir, it is not your intention to attempt a settlement upon the Loup, as your course implies?" resumed the stranger, in an inquiring way.

"By no means, sir, for I am bound for a ranch which I have purchased upon the Platte."

"The Platte, sir?"

"Yes, for I have purchased the Waller Ranch and its cattle."

"The Platte, sir, is not in this direction," said the stranger, with some surprise.

"So I know, sir! but my guide, who has ridden on ahead to find a camping ground for the night, takes this trail to avoid bands of Indians on the direct trail," explained Mr. Markham, while Madge sat on her horse, attentively regarding the strange horseman, who, interested, apparently, in what her father had said, did not glance toward her.

"Why, I have just come from Fort McPherson along the river trail, and have seen no traces of redskins, nor heard of any at Fort Kearney, when I halted there, for I am bearing dispatches, sir, from McPherson to Omaha."

"My guide met some one who told him there were Indians on our trail."

"He was misinformed, I assure you, for there is no

man on the border who knows better than I the movements of the hostiles."

"That being the case, we have come a long way off our course for nothing."

"You have, indeed, sir, and another day on this trail would take you right into the Indian country, where your train would fall an easy prey to massacre!"

"My dear sir, you surprise me, for I cannot understand how my guide can be so ignorant of the facts as you state."

"Who is your guide, may I ask?"

"He is known in Omaha, where I engaged him, as Kio Carl."

Both Mr. Markham and Madge saw the start the stranger gave, while he answered promptly:

"I know him, sir, as an infamous scoundrel, and he bears upon his right ear my mark."

"That man, sir, was leading you into a trap, for he is friendly with old Black Face, the chief of the tribe into whose clutches this trail will take you."

These words fell like a thunderclap upon both Mr. Markham and Madge, and they sat staring in amazement upon the strange horseman before them.

"My dear sir, you astound me," at last Mr. Markham found words to say.

"Kio Carl would have astounded you still more, sir, had I not struck your trail, and, knowing no train should come up here, feared you were lost, and came on to warn you."

"And most heartily do I thank you, sir; for your

manner and your face carry conviction with all you say."

"I also join my father, sir, in thanking you," said Madge softly.

The stranger's face flushed, and he said quickly:

"I seek no thanks, nor do I want them, for doing my duty.

"My orders are imperative to press on to Omaha, but I felt I would not be doing my duty to allow you to go on this trail, when I knew your force, so came to warn you."

"May I ask how you knew what force I had?" asked Mr. Markham.

"It is as plain to me, sir, as are the lightning and thunder the precursors of a storm, for I read trails as an open book.

"See, there are the trails of your ambulances and wagons, half blurred out by a few cattle, and I knew you could not have more than half a dozen fighting men, which in this country would be a mere handful against old Black Face and his braves, more especially if you were led into an ambush."

"I see, sir, that you read signs on the prairie as one would an open book, for my force does number but a dozen, all told."

"You say that your guide has gone on to prepare you a camping place?"

"Yes; so he said."

"The more likely to arrange his red allies into an ambush for you."

Both Mr. Markham and Madge paled slightly, while the former said anxiously:

"Then what is to be done, sir?"

For a moment the stranger was silent, and then he said:

"If you ask my advice, sir, it is to go no farther."

"Yet your duty will not permit you to guide us?"

"No, it will not, I regret to say, unless——"

He paused, and Madge quickly said:

"Your manner implies that there is a possibility that you may do so."

"Lady, were your father alone—that is, were there only men on the train—I would set them on the right trail and let them look to their manhood and prowess to pull them through all right. But with yourself, and, as I see, another lady on the train, I feel that it is my duty to make every sacrifice. First, however, we will settle about Kio Carl, and then I will decide what is best to be done."

"And what would you advise about him?" asked Mr. Markham.

"Catch him," was the laconic response.

"But how?"

"He has gone to yonder motte?"

"So he said."

"He is not in sight on the prairie."

"No; he was just disappearing when we sighted you."

"Then he does not know of my coming?"

"He cannot possibly do so."

"Then we'll fetch him back to the train."

"Yet how can we do so?"

"Halt your train, call all your men about one wagon, as though it had broken down, and then wait until he discovers that you are delayed."

"Well, sir?"

"Naturally he will return, and here on the open prairie you have him at your mercy."

"And you advise that we seize him?"

"Oh, no, sir; I will do that."

"You?"

"Yes; leave him to me, for I will keep in the background until the proper moment to act."

"And then?"

"And then you will see that he knows who I am and that I am aware that he is a black-hearted villain."

"You will not kill him?" asked Madge timidly.

"No, miss, for I never take the life of a human being unless it is absolutely necessary," was the response, and Madge breathed more freely, as she had feared that she would be compelled to witness one of those dread scenes for which the far frontier was noted, and of which she had incidentally heard so much.

"I will do at once as you suggest, sir," said Mr. Markham, and he rode forward and halted the train, for the three had been riding at the rear during the conversation that took place.

In a few moments the train had come to a halt, Mr. Markham had explained to the men the tidings brought by the strange horseman, and all gathered about one of the wagons, as though engaged in mending a broken-down vehicle.

Back in the rear the stranger waited, standing by the side of his superb horse and conversing with Mr. Markham and Madge.

Eagerly Mr. Markham watched for the returning form of the guide, and thus nearly an hour passed away.

At last the eye of the stranger, as powerful in sight as a glass, caught sight of the guide, and he said simply:

"He is coming."

"Ah, I see him now!" and Mr. Markham gazed earnestly at him through his field glass, as did also Madge, who remarked:

"You have marvelous eyes, sir, for he is yet very far off."

"And is returning at a gallop, which will bring him here in half an hour."

"You have superb sight, sir," said Mr. Markham.

"The sight of the prairie man, sir, as with the sailor, improves with long practice in searching vast expanses, where a failure to detect a foe often brings death, hence it is most necessary to cultivate one's vision, and, though I carry a glass, I seldom need its use," was the reply.

"Well, sir, have you decided what you shall do when the guide returns?" asked Mr. Markham, somewhat nervously, as the returning forms of horse and rider grew each instant more distinct.

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask what it is you will do?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Please go forward with your daughter to where the men are, and when Kio Carl comes up and asks the cause of your delay, simply tell him that you have decided to retrace your trail and take the right one, along the Platte."

"And then?"

"I will attend to the balance, sir," was the calm reply.

Mr. Markham nodded and rode forward with Madge, leaving the stranger concealed behind the rear wagon.

A quarter of an hour passed, the whole family gathered about the center of the train and waited somewhat nervously for the coming of the guide, whom all seemed to fear.

Presently he dashed up and asked sternly:

"What means this long halt here, when there is hardly time to reach a camping ground before night?"

"It means, Kio Carl, that I have decided to go no farther on this trail," was Mr. Markham's firm response.

"Ha! Do you intend to assume the duties of guide, sir?" was the angry response.

Mr. Markham hesitated, and then came, in deep tones:

"No, but I do, Kio Carl!"

The man started back, jerking cruelly upon his reins, until he forced his horse upon its haunches, and while his face became pallid, cried, in startled tones:

"Buffalo Bill!"

The stranger had stepped boldly out before him, from behind one of the wagons, and held his revolver leveled at the guide.

His face was smiling now, and he answered, in a free-and-easy way:

"Correct, Kio Carl, and I have the drop on you!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TRAITOR GUIDE.

"Buffalo Bill!"

The voices of the teamsters uttered the words in chorus, for the name spoken by Carl had told who was the stranger, and all knew him well by reputation, though not one of the trainmen had before seen him, excepting the traitor guide.

Kio Carl was a man of consummate nerve, and he regained his coolness almost at once, and said, in as free and easy a way as that in which Buffalo Bill had addressed him:

"Yes, and it is not the first time you have had the drop on me, Cody."

"And I warn you to beware of the third," was Buffalo Bill's response.

"Yes, for the tide must turn; but what means this attack on me now?"

"It means that I have caught you at your old tricks of deviltry and thwarted you."

"To what do you refer?"

"You were leading this train to an ambush, at the head of which, doubtless, was your old redskin friend, Chief Black Face."

The guide turned deadly pale at this bold accusation, but no muscle of his face quivered, as he answered savagely:

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"You have no proof of this, Buffalo Bill!"

"By the Rocky Mountains! But I will have, sir, before another sun shall rise. Up with your hands!"

This last was given in a tone that was decided.

The guide hesitated, and Buffalo Bill repeated:

"Up with your hands, Kio Carl!"

"You have no right to make me a prisoner."

"I assert that right! Will you obey?"

"No! And I call upon my employer and his men to aid me against you!" Carl cried, sliding from his horse and confronting the scout.

"They will do nothing, and if you love life, worthless as yours is, I shall tell you but once more to throw up those bloodstained hands of yours. Obey, or take the consequences!"

The revolver was held firmly as though in a vise, and all saw that Buffalo Bill meant what he said.

Wholly at Buffalo Bill's mercy, Kio Carl, with a bitter execration, raised his hands above his head.

Stepping forward, it was but the work of a minute for Buffalo Bill to disarm him, and then, taking the lariat from his saddle horn, he ordered the guide to remount his horse, which Kio Carl did with a smothered curse. Once again in the saddle, Buffalo Bill bound him securely hand and foot, tying his feet beneath his horse.

"Now you are safe for the present, and if my suspicions are verified this night, with the permission of this gentleman, I will shoot you as I would a mad dog."

are myself," replied the teamster, and he dragged out a pair of coarse pants, a slouch hat, full of holes, and a woolen shirt and began to pull them upon the still unconscious man, while Buffalo Bill was rigging himself out in the clothing of the guide.

"Thar, now, he do look well, an' you must take keer, Buffalo Bill, yer don't let the devilment in them clo's strike in, fer it are a disease that are catching."

Both Buffalo Bill and Mr. Markham laughed at the advice of the worthy teamster, and the latter said:

"I don't know, sir, what your intention is, but I shall take care of your arms and clothing for you until you come to claim them."

Buffalo Bill made no reply; but, stepping to his saddle pocket, drew forth what appeared to be a bundle of hair.

But, upon unrolling it, it proved to be a long, false beard, of almost the exact hue of that of Kio Carl.

"Curse you!"

The oath came from the guide.

"Ha! ha! Kio Carl, I can play you pretty well, can't I?" and Buffalo Bill rumbled up his hair, put on the false beard, pulled the slouch hat over his eyes, and did look the very counterpart of the traitor guide.

Taking the weapons and horse of Kio Carl and leaving his own in the care of Mr. Markham, he rode away once more, and so much resembled the traitor guide that the rest of those in the train, seeing him depart, believed that, for some reason, Buffalo Bill had returned and set the prisoner free.

After watching him for some moments, in company with the teamster and the prisoner himself, Mr. Markham rode on after the train, and all were surprised at the change which had taken place, and which Seedy Sam, the wagon driver, explained in his quaint way to his pards, while Madge heard from her father's lips what had occurred.

CHAPTER XXX.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLOT.

It was very evident that in changing his clothes for those of Kio Carl, Buffalo Bill intended some bold ruse, and his words as he rode along, spoken half aloud, showed what his intention was.

"I am confident," he muttered, "that old Black Face lies concealed in the timber yonder, with a score or two of braves, and Carl was leading the train into the ambush, and was to share the spoils with the redskins.

"Great heavens! What a fate that beautiful girl would have suffered! I shudder to think of it, and, if I am right, Kio Carl will do no more harm in this world, once I lay my clutch upon him again. Now I'll see if I am right before the sun is set half an hour, and if my rig will bear muster with old Black Face."

He then rode quietly on, the timber ahead of him rising dark and threatening, and his keen eyes searching its depths for some sign of a foe.

As the sun touched the distant prairie horizon, he was within a mile of the timber, which jutted out from the river to a considerable distance and formed a secure hiding place for a thousand savage foes within the shadow of its large trees and thickets.

After a long and untiring peering into the timber,

Buffalo Bill's Plot.

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Buffalo Bill was rewarded by discovering a moving form.

"Injun!"

The word escaped his lips like an exclamation, and peering still more closely, he continued:

"As I thought, Kio Carl meant deviltry. Ah! There come several of the red rascals to meet me, or, rather, to meet him, as they believe, or I am mistaken. Now, Buffalo Bill, look out!"

With a light laugh, as though he relished and defied the great danger he was running, Buffalo Bill arranged his toilet more to his taste, as he deemed it necessary, looked to his arms, and rode quickly along the timber.

Five horsemen had come out of the timber, and were riding leisurely toward the scout, as if to meet him, and yet exhibiting toward him no hostile demonstrations.

They were Indians, in all their glory of war paint and feathers, and one rode slightly in advance of the other four.

"The devil himself, as I live!" said Buffalo Bill.

Then in a moment he added:

"Old Black Face has noticed that the train has turned back, for he evidently had lookouts in the treetops, and he is coming to ask me, or rather, Kio Carl, as he thinks, for the reason. Well, the train was too far off for him to see anything going on of a suspicious nature."

It was now growing dark, and when Buffalo Bill drew within a couple of hundred yards of the Indians, he was confirmed in his opinion that Kio Carl had

turned traitor to his own race, and that Black Face was his ally in deviltry, for as yet no hostile sign was shown by the redskins.

Upon getting within a few lengths of the Indians, Buffalo Bill, imitating, as nearly as possible—and he was a good mimic—the voice of Kio Carl, called out at random:

"Does the Black Face frown at his white brother, that he brings not the train into the timber?"

"The paleface spoke crooked to the Black Face, to bring him here with his warriors."

"No."

"Yes, for his white brother came two suns ago and told the Black Face to be here. He came with his warriors and he saw the white chief coming over the prairie, and far behind him the wheel tepees of his people. Then the Black Face saw, and his warriors saw, that the paleface turned back to the wheel tepees, and then they went toward the rising sun, on the trail they had come, while my white brother comes on alone."

"The Black Face speaks of what his eyes have seen," said Buffalo Bill, speaking the Sioux tongue perfectly. "But he knows not what his brother has to say."

"The Black Face will listen," said the chief, evidently greatly disappointed at having seen the train turn back.

"Let the Black Face have his ears open. His braves, in the treetops, may have seen a paleface runner, on horseback, join the train?"

"The braves of the Black Face said so."

"Aha! I'll make this old wretch tell me all he knows!" muttered Buffalo Bill, while aloud he said:

"That was a horse brave of the paleface chief, sent to order the wheel tepees back to the Platte, as many white soldiers are on the track of the Black Face."

The Indian chief started and glanced nervously at his warriors, while Buffalo Bill continued:

"The brother of the Black Face heard all, and he told the chief of the wheel tepees which trail to take and where to camp, and sent word to the captain of the horse braves that he would go on and find the Black Face and his warriors, and then come and tell them where to strike his village."

The old chief fairly shouted with rage at this bold assertion, failing to see that there was a pretended motive, and Buffalo Bill cried:

"Let the Black Face hear, for by telling the horse braves of the whites this crooked story, he could come on and meet his red brothers, let them know where and when to strike the wheel tepees, then go back and tell the paleface chief a false trail for his warriors to take, and lead them into an ambush which my brother here can have ready."

"Ugh!" said the Black Face, now seeing through the supposed ruse of his pretended ally.

"Ugh!" grunted the four warriors, delighted at the prospect of blood, booty, and scalps before them.

"The Black Face has heard," said the chief, as though anxious to hear more and not willing to show curiosity to do so.

"I guess you have, you old villain, and if I don't fill

that ugly head of yours full of lies, it will be because my tongue sticks to the truth too fast to pull it off," mentally observed Buffalo Bill, while aloud he continued:

"The Black Face knows the Lone Tree, toward the setting sun?"

"The Black Face has been there," was the pompous reply.

"Two suns from this the wheel tepees will camp there."

"Ugh!"

"Let the Black Face creep upon the camp by night, leaving their ponies far out on the prairie, and his braves can do their work."

"Ugh!" and the grunt was one of satisfaction most intense.

"His brother will be there, and when the braves of the Black Face have many scalps at their belts, and their ponies are loaded with the booty of the palefaces, I lead them on to the spot where the white warriors can be met in battle and defeated."

"Ugh! My white brother is a great chief. Let him come to my camp," said the delighted savage.

"No, for I must be off on the trail to seek the white chief."

"The White Panther, the paleface brother of the chief, is in the camp and would see him."

Buffalo Bill fairly started at the name, for he had long heard of the renegade white known as the White Panther, whose crimes had forced him to seek refuge among the redskins.

He knew him to be also a companion of Kio Carl, and did he meet him at once would his disguise be penetrated, and death would quickly follow, and death of the most awful torture that Indian cruelty could devise.

Remembering that Mr. Markham had told how Kio Carl had secretly met a white man on the prairie, he felt sure that White Panther, as the Indians called him, and Salt Lake Saul, as he was known in the settlements, must be that individual, who had gone on ahead, when his pard became the guide of the train, for no other purpose than to get old Black Face as an ally.

He knew that he had to be most cautious, not to betray ignorance, so asked, as a feeler:

"Why did not the White Panther come with my brother, the Black Face, to meet me?"

"The Panther has ridden hard, and was tired and asleep."

"Ah, but he must have eyes like the stars now, for I want him to guide the wheel tepees to the Lone Tree."

"The Black Face will tell him."

"It is well, and I will start on the back trail. Let the Panther have a swift pony and follow."

"It shall be as my white brother says," replied the old chief, and bidding the redskins farewell, Buffalo Bill started upon his return, greatly rejoicing at his discovery and the accomplishment of his ruse.

He had gone but a short distance when he called

back to the Black Face to bid the White Panther to hurry on after him, and there came back the answer:

"The Panther shall have my swiftest pony and will soon be with my white brother."

"It will be a sad moment for him when he is, or I am mistaken," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he rode on his way, plotting mischief against the man on whose head a reward was offered as a renegade and a red-handed murderer.

The individual known as the White Panther was sleeping as serenely beneath the shelter of a tree, when Black Face returned to the timber, as though the blood of scores of whites whom he had murdered did not rest upon his guilty soul.

He had ridden hard that day, and in fact for several days had had but little rest, so he was glad to seek repose in security and dream of the booty he was to be a sharer in when the Markham train was at the mercy of the red demons who were his allies.

He was surprised when Black Face awoke him to make known that he had seen Kio Carl coming, and had met him out upon the prairie, and told him of the train going to the right-about.

"Durn them sogers!" he said savagely. "They is allus pokin' round where they ain't wanted. But then, as it are, it are better, chief, fer ef we hed tackled ther train, ther sogers w'u'd hev been too hot on our trail ter save ther booty, an' all we'd hev got w'u'd hev been sculps, which you Injuns prizes more'n we whites, onless we has a leetle revenge in ther biz."

All this was spoken in border English, which Black Face imperfectly understood, and could make no more appropriate reply to than that Kio Carl was a great chief, had done the Indians many good turns, and knew what was best, and wished the White Panther to follow him at once, and go as guide to the wheel tepees.

"Durnation! More ridin', and my horse already played!"

"The Panther shall have the pony of the Black Face," was the response of the chief, who knew that though his pony was a good animal, that of the renegade was a better one, though then tired out, and that in the end he would gain by his generosity.

"I'll make the swap, chief, fer I has my eye on a horse I seen on the train, afore it pulled out o' Omaha. Git out yer pony, an' I'll strike Carl's trail."

The pony soon had the saddle and trappings of the renegade upon him, and, mounting, the villain set off at a swinging lope which threatened to soon overtake Buffalo Bill, did he not increase the pace at which he had ridden away.

An hour's gallop and he saw in the distance the dark forms of a horse and rider, and instantly he gave a shrill whistle.

"Ho, Saul, that you?" cried a voice, and the renegade replied:

"Yas, and I hes hed a lively gallop to overtook yer. Is yer ridin' fer a prize, Carl?"

"Yes, I am."

"Waal, what is ther stakes?" and the renegade drew rein, as his pony got head and head with the gaunt black ridden by Buffalo Bill.

"The stake is White Panther, alias Salt Lake Saul, as you see!"

The answer fell ike a thunderclap from a cloudless sky upon the startled renegade, while he felt a revolver muzzle pressed hard against his heart.

Salt Lake Saul was a quick man with revolver and knife, and a hard one to surprise, as many had found out to their cost.

But he had been caught for once, and by one he deemed his devoted pard.

There must be some mistake; and he half laughed forth:

"What in thunder does yer mean, Carl?"

"Just what I say," was the stern rejoinder.

"An' what did yer say?"

"That the stake I am now playing for is Salt Lake Saul, the renegade, and I have won it!"

"Durnation! Does yer think this are a place ter joke, pard?"

"Move one finger and you will find this is no joke, but deadly earnest."

"What hev I did ter turn yer agin' me this way?"

"I am not Kio Carl."

"Holy Rockies! Then I are cotched!"

"Yes, the Panther is entrapped, at last. Hold, keep those hands away from your gun or I pull trigger, and it's but an inch from your heart to my pistol muzzle."

"Durned ef yer ain't right! But who in thunder be yer thet looks like Kio, and yet ain't got his voice, now I obsarves?"

"Have you ever heard of Buffalo Bill?"

"Bitin' snakes o' Ireland! Is yer that terror?" almost howled the renegade.

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill."

"Then ther dance's done and ther fiddler's ter pay," was the almost resigned response.

"Yes, and Death's the fiddler."

"Don't doubt it, Buffler, and I'll soon hev a harp o' a thousan' strings to sing psalms o' glory on."

"Or a poker to stir up the fire below."

"Don't speak o' it, fer it makes me shiver to think how hot it are, and——"

Quicker than a flash of lightning he had dropped his hand upon a revolver butt, and it was half out of his belt, when Buffalo Bill clutched it and cried sternly:

"Hold on, sir, for I am your master!"

"Yer takes my hand, pard. I pass," said the disappointed renegade, and at an order to raise his hands above his head, he silently obeyed, while Buffalo Bill disarmed him.

"Now your claws are cut, we'll get along better together, and I want to be sociable, as I have some questions to ask you."

"Shout out fust how 'tis yer looks so like Kio Carl as ter take me in, and ther Black Face, too."

"Oh, that is simply a little game I played to find out what I wanted to know."

"An' yer did?"

"Yes."

"I hopes it will do yer no good."

"But it will, for I shall see you hang along with Carl."

"Hes yer got him, too?"

"I have."

"So I sees when I looks at thet hoss yer straddles. Waal, waal, we is both took in, and old Black Face made a dern fool of, too."

"You seem to feel better over the news?"

"I does, fer misery loves comp'ny, and I are miser'ble to a howling degree that are painful."

"You'll soon be out of your misery."

"T'd ruther be miser'ble, onderstandin' yer meanin' as I does. But tell me, Buffler, where hev yer got Carl?"

"Safe."

"And are I goin' there, too?"

"Yes."

"You is er liar!"

The right hand, which had slipped into some mysterious pocket and quietly grasped a small repeater, was suddenly thrust forward right in the face of Buffalo Bill, and as the finger touched the trigger, the flash and the report came together.

But quick as was the act, Buffalo Bill succeeded in striking up the arm of the renegade, and the bullet tore along the top of his head, inflicting a scalp wound only.

Though slightly stunned by the shock and momentarily blinded, Buffalo Bill drew trigger, ere a second shot came from the renegade, and the wail of agony and hatred that broke from his lips told that the bullet had hit him hard.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR A FOE'S SAKE.

"And you think," said Madge, when her father had joined her and told of Buffalo Bill's having assumed the rig of Kio Carl, "that he will dare venture into the camp of the savages, pretending to be the guide?"

"Yes, my daughter, for from all I have heard of that famous man, I know he will hesitate at no risk to carry out his ends.

"How different he is from what I had pictured him, when reading romances of his strange deeds upon the border. He seemed to me, as the writers pen-painted him, a giant and ferocious being whose hands and clothing must be covered with the blood of his foes. But we find him an elegant gentleman, courtly, and as handsome as a picture."

"He is, indeed, a remarkable man, Madge, and I sincerely hope he will come safely through all his dangers. It is certainly very noble of him to set aside his duties, which must be urgent, to get us out of the scrape into which that traitorous guide led us."

"Oh, father, what if Buffalo Bill had not come on after us?" and Madge shuddered, while Mr. Markham answered:

"The thought of what would have followed, Madge, is terrible to contemplate."

And thus father and daughter talked on, until at

last the new camping ground was reached, and the tent was spread, which was especially for the use of Madge and Miss Samantha Doolittle.

In getting things to rights, preparing supper, and making himself generally useful, Pepper, the youth, was invaluable, and won pronounced praise from Miss Samantha.

"Madge," she said, "I do be thinking that Providence was most kind to that boy, to bring him under the shelter of our guardian wings."

"Or to us, auntie"—Madge always called Miss Doolittle auntie, though that lady had begged her to make it "cousin"—"for Pepper certainly has proven himself most useful in everything, and is really womanly in all he does for us."

"True, Madge, true, he almost seems to me like a woman, at times, but do you know you were sadly remiss to-day?"

"How so, auntie?"

"In your duty."

"What sin did I commit and what duty omit, pray?"

"You did not introduce me to that very elegant gentleman, Mr. Buffalo Bill."

"Why, auntie, I hardly met him myself, and I knew not who he was until Kio Carl spoke his name."

"Well, Madge, I don't know as I should, and I don't know but what I should have spoken to him without an introduction, under the circumstances, for I owed him our thanks for all he did."

"He did not seem to like thanks, auntie."

"True nobility, my dear, the truest kind, that avoids

recognition for brave deeds done. If I were him, I don't know as I should, and I don't know but what I should do the same way; but——"

"Here's Pepper to announce supper," said Madge, glad to cut off the beginning of a few comments which Miss Doolittle always made lengthy when she began with "but."

The youth known as Pepper was almost a boy in years, for he seemed hardly twenty, and his face was one that few could gaze upon and fail to see that in it to admire and like.

He was dressed in a free-and-easy costume and wore beneath his coat a belt of arms.

His hair, contrary to the border custom, was cut short, and his slouch hat had the rim pulled down all around.

"Miss Madge, supper is served, and Aunt Phyllis has made some of Miss Samanth's favorite hoecakes," he said, in a boyish voice, and with a mischievous twinkle of the eye.

"Oh, Pepper, why do you call me Miss Samanth, and never pronounce the last syllable?" cried the old maid.

"It's too much for me to tackle, miss, as I have a shortness of breath," replied the youth, and he led the way to the fire, where Mr. Markham was already seated at the table, upon which Aunt Phyllis, the negro woman, was placing a tempting meal.

Mr. Markham and the ladies sat down to supper, while Pepper busied himself in aiding Coon, the negro man, in getting things to rights for the night.

But there was one missing from the table, who each meal had sat with them, and that one was the guide.

In the goodness of her heart, Madge herself arranged a tray with his supper and carried it to him to where he sat upon the trunk of a tree, securely bound.

"I have come with your supper, sir," she said quietly.

His head was bent, and at her words he looked up, and the firelight showed that his face flushed, while he said in his quiet way:

"You are very kind, Miss Markham; but one doomed to die cares little for food."

"But you are not doomed to die," said Madge, struck by his manner and the pathos in his voice.

"Ah, you little know that inhuman wretch, Buffalo Bill!"

"He certainly does not look like the man you paint him."

"Looks are deceiving, Miss Markham, as you will find out when you know him better."

"It will take a great deal to make me believe that he is other than an honorable man, for if his face lies, then where will we ever look for honor and virtue imprinted on the human countenance?"

"So I once thought, Miss Markham, and I loved Buffalo-Bill as a brother. I had a happy home, and all about me to make life joyous; but, like the snake he is, he came into my household and left only ruin, despair, and sorrow behind him. I sought revenge upon him, and here is his mark."

He drew aside his hair as he spoke, revealing a hole in his ear, evidently made by a bullet passing through.

After a moment he resumed, and his voice quivered:

"He called that 'his mark'; but, oh, he had left far worse scars on my heart! I came to the prairies to hide my sorrows, and here he has dogged me, and, with his plausible story, see how I am, while he has gone free. Soon he will return and tell strange stories of me, saying he has verified all he said, and your father's trainmen will swing me up like a dog to die."

"No, they will not do that; but a trial will be given you," said Madge earnestly.

"There is no justice on this border, Miss Markham, excepting such as is administered from the muzzle of a revolver and the point of a knife."

"But my father will see that you do not suffer innocently."

"Miss Markham, your father is a just man, but the men who are now his teamsters are cowboys, and a wild set, who love turmoil rather than peace, and Buffalo Bill will soon set them upon me like a pack of hounds, while your father will be powerless to aid me."

"But surely he will not do this wrong?"

"He surely will, and worse, as he has done in the past."

"But remember the splendid name he has won along the border as the foe of evildoers, and he is the bulwark that stands between the settler and the cruel redskins."

"The stories of novelists, Miss Markham, I assure you. But I can do nothing, so will say no more."

He bowed his head, and Madge was deeply impressed with all she had heard.

She believed Buffalo Bill honorable and noble and the guide guilty, but still there might be the shadow of a doubt to both beliefs, and he was entitled to the doubt until proven wicked.

"Answer me," she said, with stern abruptness. "Why did you leave the regular trail?"

"As I told your father, Miss Markham, to flank a band of redskins."

"But Buffalo Bill said there were no Indians on the regular trail, and there were many on the way we were going."

"It is but a question between us, Miss Markham. When I am dead and beyond recall to earth you will find that I was the one sinned against."

"If I could believe this, I would at once set you free," she said, in her earnest, impulsive way.

His eyes flashed, and he dropped his head, the more to hide his thoughts, which surged through his brain like a torrent.

After a while he seemed to have decided his course, and said, in his low, really soft tones:

"Miss Markham, as a man who stands looking down into his own grave, you will forgive me for what I say to you. I say it asking no mercy at your hands, but only to prove to you that I am innocent of the charge against me. Will you hear me?"

"Yes."

"And forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive?"

"That which I have to say to you."

"I will hear you."

"I will only say then, that when a man of my strong nature loves, he would risk life, all, for the one who has won that love, and face death a thousand times to shield her from harm. My love may have made me overcautious, but loving you as I confess I do, I did all in my power to shield you from harm, and would have gone hundreds of miles out of my way, rather than have had an Indian fire upon this train. I have only to say, Miss Markham, that thus loving you I could not have willfully led you into danger."

Madge Markham fairly trembled at the words of the man.

She had seen that he liked to be with her, yet, even in her short life, she had received so much homage from men, which her beauty, wit, and lovely character commanded, she had not noticed that he felt for her more than friendly regard.

His confession of love, coming as it did from a man in his situation and deadly peril, fairly stunned her.

She felt pained, deeply so, for what could she say in return, not even liking him, in spite of her admiration for the manly qualities he had exhibited in their few weeks' acquaintance? For the daily marches of the train had not averaged many miles.

There was one thing this confession did, and that was just what Kio Carl had aimed at.

That was, it caused her to doubt the guide's guilt and to feel a germ of suspicion against Buffalo Bill.

after all she had heard against him from the lips of the prisoner.

Madge was impulsive, and her feelings frequently prompted her to act immediately, so she said, after a moment of silence:

"If you can be so base as to be deceiving me, may God forgive you!"

"Ha! Then there is in your heart a return of the affection I feel——"

The man's eager tones were checked by her quick and cold words:

"No! no! no! Do not misunderstand me, sir, for I meant not to imply that I cared for you, for on the contrary, I do not; but if you are so base as to have said you loved me merely to touch my sympathy for you, I repeat, may God forgive you!"

He seemed disappointed, and said in an injured tone:

"You are unkind to doubt me after such a confession."

"I will, acting upon that confession, believe you innocent, and if you pledge yourself to return within the month and prove yourself innocent of the charge against you to my father, I will set you free."

He started and answered:

"And if I so prove myself innocent, what may I expect from you?"

"Nothing more than the pleasure I will feel in having saved an innocent man from the death which you say will be visited upon you."

"And that is all?"

"All."

"No more?"

"You have heard me, sir, and I have nothing more to say."

She took from her pocket, as she spoke, a knife and quickly severed the bonds that held him fast.

"Now, you are free, and I advise you to lose no time in making your escape, which can easily be done while the men are at supper. Good-by, sir, and if I do wrong, Heaven forgive me; if right, I will have my own reward."

She turned away, as she spoke, and, though he called her, she did not stop, but continued on to her tent, while he, with a sinister, triumphant smile, glided away into the shadows of the timber, sprang upon the back of the first horse he came to and rode off upon the prairie.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RETURN.

When Seedy Sam went to make his prisoner secure for the night, by tying him more firmly to a tree, and sleeping by his side, a yell of surprise alarmed the camp, and brought all to the spot, excepting Madge and Miss Doolittle.

The two ladies remained at their tent, the old maid chattering like a parrot with alarm, and longing over and over again for the coming of "Mr." Buffalo Bill.

"What is it, Pepper?" she asked excitedly, as the lad came back from the scene, followed by Coon and Phyllis.

"Satan's broke his chains, Miss Samantha," was the reply.

"You naughty boy! What do you mean now?" asked the elderly maiden.

"Missy Sumtha, de boy do mean dat de prizner hav gotted loose, so he have," said Phyllis.

"Oh, catch me!" yelled Miss Samantha, staggering backward toward Pepper.

But Pepper stepped aside, and Miss Doolittle had a fall that made her false teeth rattle and her "store curls" quiver.

"Lordy! chile, what fer yer let Missy Sumtha take a tumble like dat?" cried Coon, springing forward,

and placing Miss Doolittle on her feet again, and who said faintly:

"Have I been in a faint long?"

"Not an instant, I assure you, Miss Doolittle, as I also promise you there is no cause for you to faint, for I set the prisoner free," said Madge coldly.

"Madge, my child, what is this I hear?" cried Mr. Markham, just then approaching the tent.

"I say, father, that Kio Carl pledged his word that the scout accused him of treachery through his hatred of him, and that to save a life, that might have to suffer innocently, I set the guide free, and he is to come to your ranch within the month and prove that he was not guilty."

"Madge!" exclaimed Mr. Markham, wholly bewildered at the bold act of his daughter.

"Kio Carl will never prove his innocence, Miss Madge."

The remarks came from Pepper, in low, earnest tones, wholly different from his usual light manner of speaking.

"Ah! how romantic of you, Madge. I do wish that I—but, no, I don't know as I should, and I don't know but what I should have done the same; but——"

"Pepper, go and tell Seedy Sam to come here," said Mr. Markham, cutting Miss Doolittle off short.

In a moment the teamster appeared, followed by his comrades, who were crowding around him.

One glance at the group, and Madge Markham realized how quickly was border justice and injustice dealt out upon that far prairie, for she saw around

the neck of Seedy Sam a lariat, and that his arms were pinioned behind him.

Instantly she sprang forward and dragged the noose from his neck, and with the same knife that had set free Kio Carl severed the lariat that bound his hands behind him.

"What does this mean?" she asked sternly, while her eyes flashed fire, and her face as seen by the firelight was flushed and angry.

"He sot ther prizner löose, miss, an' we were goin' ter string him up," said one.

"It is no such thing, for I set Carl free, not wishing to see a man die who swore he was innocent," was the ringing response.

"Pards, yer hears her talk, an' I guesses yer takes a back seat now, while Seedy Sam shouts thankfulness to this heur lady fur savin' him from bein' h'isted." And that worthy individual, who in ten minutes more would have been innocently hanged, stepped forward, doffed his hat, and bowed low before Madge, who answered:

"I am sorry my act should have so endangered your life, and also that your comrades are so ready to kill upon a mere suspicion of guilt. If any one must suffer, I am the one."

"An' I guesses ther pilgrim that says a word ter yer gits choked with a bullit," said Seedy Sam, picking up his belt of arms, which one of the crowd had dropped, and glowering around upon those who had so nearly ended his life.

But the teamsters were abashed by the mistake they

had made and were only too glad to skulk away, threatening to get Seedy Sam drunk, as a way of asking his forgiveness for the error they had committed.

As to Mr. Markham, he knew not what to say or do as Madge kissed him good night and silently entered her tent, whither Miss Samantha quickly followed, leaving the father seated by the fire brooding over what had occurred, and wondering what motive could have prompted his daughter to do as she had done.

"Can she love him?" he groaned aloud as the thought flashed through his mind.

The members of the train went to their blanket beds that night with something to ponder over, from Seedy Sam, who thought of his escape, and his comrades, who could not decide upon the motives of Madge in releasing the prisoner, down to her father, who feared he had solved that motive, and Coon and Phyllis, who talked it over as they dropped asleep.

The following morning, as the savory smell of broiling antelope steaks was wafted through the timber, the teamster acting as sentinel called out that a horseman was in sight.

Soon after he cried:

"Thar is two of 'em!"

The excitement in the camp at once grew great, for they knew not what danger they had to confront.

But it was only a short time before Madge, looking through her glass, cried:

"It is the guide coming back, mounted upon his own horse, while he leads another animal, upon the back of which is a heavy load, apparently."

Her father took the glass, and said, after glancing through it:

"That is not the guide, Kio Carl, my daughter, but Buffalo Bill in his clothing."

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten that he disguised himself to look like the guide, father."

"What, is it that elegant gentleman, Mr. Buffalo Bill?" cried Miss Doolittle, primping up her curls.

"It certainly is, Miss Samantha," answered Mr. Markham.

"I am so glad, and I hope, Madge, that you will not be so remiss as to fail to present him to me."

"I will not forget it, auntie; but, father, do you observe anything strange about the burden the led horse bears?"

Mr. Markham looked attentively through his glass for a moment, and answered:

"Yes, Madge."

"Well, sir?"

"It is a human being."

"So I thought."

"Laws sakes, and the poor critter is tied to the horse?"

"Yes, Miss Samantha, and he is either badly wounded, or——"

"Dead," added Madge, as her father paused.

All who had heard the conversation now gazed with interest upon the coming horseman, and as he drew nearer they could distinctly see that the led horse carried a human form, yet whether dead or alive it was hard to tell.

Nearer and nearer the two horses came, until presently Buffalo Bill drew rein near the tent, and politely raised his hat to the ladies, while Mr. Markham said:

"Glad to see you back, scout, and I hope you bring us good news."

"I bring you a wounded prisoner, sir, the companion of Kio Carl," and Buffalo Bill threw aside the false beard he wore, sprang to the ground, and approached the led horse, which was a spotted Indian pony. Upon the back of the pony Buffalo Bill had arranged blankets so as to form a kind of resting place for the wounded man, whose face was white and pinched, as with great anguish.

His feet and arms had been so bound as to hold him in position, and though he had suffered fearfully at every step of the horse, he had borne up bravely through the long night's ride.

The teamsters and all the camp had now gathered around, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Make me up a bed for him as soon as possible."

This was quickly done, and, aided by Seedy Sam, the scout raised the wounded man from the back of the pony.

"Gently, pard Bill, fer yer bullit hunted deep, an' I ain't no child ter groan at a trifle," he said, as his face became livid, when Buffalo Bill laid him upon the hastily constructed couch.

"He is most severely wounded, I see," said Mr. Markham, in a sympathetic tone.

"He has his mortal wound, sir," was the calm reply.

"Can ne not live?"

The question came timidly from Madge.

"Not an hour longer, miss."

"Introduce me, Madge, for I wish to speak to the famous scout, and ask him a few questions," said Miss Doolittle, driving her sharp elbow into the side of the maiden.

But Madge was gazing sorrowfully upon the dying man, and, seeing that an introduction was not to be had just then, Miss Doolittle made a low curtsy, gave a smirk, and said:

"Pardon my speaking to you, great scout, without a formal presentation, and let the circumstances under which we meet be my excuse for my boldness, for I don't know as I should, and I don't know but what I should; but——" Here she gave the usual pause, and Mr. Markham coughed, Madge turned away, and Coon was heard to say, in a low tone:

"Golly, but she am a talker!"

"But," repeated Miss Doolittle, in a louder tone, "will you kindly inform me, sir, if that poor suffering mortal man was slain by the aborigines?"

"Don't toot yer horn too lively, old gal, fer I ain't dead yet," came from the wounded man, and in spite of himself Buffalo Bill smiled; but, checking the laughter that was upon his lips, he said:

"No, miss; this man was wounded by myself."

"You shot him?" and Miss Doolittle grew faint.

"I did, madam."

"He shouts truth, old gal, an' yer may set him down as havin' kilt me, fer I got it heur; but I don't blame

him, fer ef he hedn't been quicker than I were, he'd 'a' been out on the prairie now."

All looked at the wounded man, and then at Buffalo Bill, who stood calmly gazing down upon the one whom he had wounded unto death.

"Can nothing be done for him, sir?" asked Madge.

"Nothing, miss."

"Who is he, sir?"

The question came from Mr. Markham, and in response Buffalo Bill said:

"He is—but ask him, sir."

The wounded man heard the query and reply, and answered for himself:

"Has yer ever heard o' Salt Lake Saul, pard?"

"I must confess I have not."

"Perhaps ef I sling my t'other handle at yer, yer'll know it. Has yer heerd o' ther White Panther?"

"A renegade said to be the ally of the Indians?"

"Yas."

"And do you claim to be that monster, of whom so much that is wicked has been said?" asked Mr. Markham, in a tone of horror, while Madge shrank back with a shudder, for she, too, had heard of the White Panther.

"No more dodgin' ther truth, pard, fer Buffler thar knows me. I are Salt Lake Saul, ther White Panther," and the dying man cast his eyes around the group to see the effect of his words.

All remained silent, and he continued, while each moment his voice grew weaker:

"I am thet pilgrim, what Buffler hes left o' me, and

as I axed him to fetch me to camp to see my old pard, Kio Carl, afore I die, he patched up this hole in my side, and here I are, so trot out Kio, or I'll leave ther life trail afore he sees me."

"He wishes to see the prisoner, Carl, alone for a few moments, and I see no reason why we should refuse the request of a dying man," said Buffalo Bill, as all looked at each other, and no one spoke in reply to the request of Salt Lake Saul.

Mr. Markham's face flushed, and he looked worried; but before he could reply, Madge stepped forward and said, in her clear tones:

"The guide, Carl, is no longer in camp, sir, for I released him last night."

Buffalo Bill was taken aback, it was evident, and he arched his eyebrows and looked to the maiden for an explanation, while the dying man shouted forth:

"Are this a leetle game to keep me from seein' Kio?"

"I assure you it is not. Kio Carl swore to me that he was innocent of the charge this gentleman made against him, and to save him from death, which he said would be his fate, I set him free."

"My dear young lady, you have made the saddest mistake of your life, for, upon your own track, you have loosened a bloodhound that knows no mercy to man or woman."

Buffalo Bill spoke the words in an impressive manner that caused every particle of blood in the face of Madge Markham to recede in a torrent upon her

heart, and for a moment she felt as though she would faint.

But recovering herself quickly, by a great effort, she said, in a low tone:

"I believed him innocent, from all he said to me."

"This man, if he will, can tell you if he is guilty or not. Will you speak, Salt Lake Saul?"

All waited breathlessly for the answer of the dying man.

He professed to be the friend of Carl, and he had long been the foe of Buffalo Bill.

Would his hatred of the scout cause him to protect Kio Carl with his last breath?

If he said that the guide was innocent, then Madge would feel that he had told the truth in speaking against Buffalo Bill.

She wished to feel that she had not done wrong, and yet she found it hard to believe that such a man as Buffalo Bill's face showed him to be could be playing a deep game against the guide.

Buffalo Bill seemed the most unconcerned of all present, and as the guide hesitated, he asked:

"Will you answer, Saul, as to the guilt of your pard?"

"What does yer wish ter know?"

"Is he not, like yourself, a renegade?"

"It are safer fer him ter live among Indians than white folks, an' thar are settlements he don't go in, onless he are disguised."

"Is that sufficient, miss?" and the scout turned to

Madge, who, without glancing at him, addressed Salt Lake Saul:

"Will you allow me a few questions, sir?"

"Yas, ef I hes time ter answer 'em; but wimmen is awful an' ongodly curus, an' maybe I mout die afore I kin answer 'em all."

In spite of herself, Madge smiled, but asked:

"Was it the intention of our guide to lead us into the power of the Indians?"

"It were."

Madge started, and again asked:

"He, then, was their ally?"

"Fact, fer I were his pard, an' he were ter take you as his prize, an' me an' Black Face an' ther bucks were ter hev ther booty."

"Oh, what have I done?" cried poor Madge, and turning to Buffalo Bill, she said pleadingly:

"I humbly ask you to forgive me, sir."

"I have nothing to forgive, Miss Markham, for myself; but it is yourself and those of the train that will be the sufferers," and Buffalo Bill bent over the dying man and said kindly:

"Is there nothing I can do for you, pard, for I will gladly execute any request you have to make?"

Salt Lake Saul's manner at once changed, and a bright light seemed to come over his face, while he dropped at once the border slang, and said in a full voice:

"Buffalo Bill, you are a true man, and I will trust you. I have long been a villain, and from bad to

worse have I gone until I die now, a renegade, a thief, and a murderer. Could man be worse?"

"Don't speak of that now," said Buffalo Bill, in the same gentle, almost womanly, softness of manner that showed the great scout in a new phase, by no means calculated to lessen him in the esteem of those who saw and heard him.

"You gave me my death wound, Buffalo Bill, and I thank you for it, for you have saved me from the gallows, and I will prove my forgiveness by leaving you a duty to perform. Around my waist, when I am dead, you will find a leather belt, in which are some valuable papers, and a little money. A confession there from me will tell who I am and what you are to do with the papers. Will you do this for me?"

"I will."

"Then I am content. Give me your hand, even if yours is honest and mine is crime-stained."

Buffalo Bill grasped the hand of the dying renegade, and, kneeling by him, thus remained.

The eyes of Salt Lake Saul closed, a smile even came over his face, and soon the grip on the scout's hand tightened and then relaxed. He was dead!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S GAME TO WIN.

It was not long, after Salt Lake Saul died, before Buffalo Bill transferred the leather belt, unexamined by him, to his own waist, and told Mr. Markham that it was necessary for him to be at once on the march.

A grave was hastily dug, the body of the renegade placed therein, and the train pulled out for the Platte trail, once more, Buffalo Bill again in his own clothing and mounted on his own horse, while Madge rode Carl's black, as the treacherous guide had, in making his escape that night, very meanly stolen the horse of the one who had set him free, in return for her kindness, for he well knew the speed and bottom of the animal.

Having set Mr. Markham on the trail with full directions what to do and where to camp, Buffalo Bill waved a farewell to the ladies—a salute Miss Doolittle took to be a kiss of the hand to her, and returned it vigorously from her finger tips—and started off across the prairie at a swinging gallop.

The noble animal seemed almost tireless, and the rest he had had while with the train made him feel perfectly fresh, so that mile after mile was thrown behind him with wonderful rapidity.

It was a long and hard ride to Fort Kearney, but the horse was fully equal to it, and shortly after **nightfall** the lights of the fort came into sight.

"I don't care for blood money, colonel; but, as I was telling you, Salt Lake Saul had gone on ahead of Carl and the train, to post old Black Face, who was to be in ambush at a certain timber motte."

"A rare plot of deviltry!"

"Which I am glad to say I thwarted, for upon coming up with the train, I found Carl had gone on ahead to prepare camp, he said, and I told Mr. Markham he was being led into a trap, got him to set one for the guide, and he came back and fell into it."

"Killed him, too, Bill?"

"No, sir."

"What a pity!"

"I only wish I had, sir, but I took his rig, and starting the train on the back trail, with him a prisoner, made up as Kio Carl, so as to fool Black Face, and went on to the timber, where he lay in ambush with just fifty braves, I afterward found out."

"You were foolhardy, Cody."

"Oh, no, colonel, only a little risky, but I met the old redskin, played Kio Carl on him, and fooled him well, and, discovering that Salt Lake Saul was back in the timber, told Black Face to send him on after me, made up a tough yarn, and put back to the train."

"Salt Lake Saul followed me, mistook me for Carl, his pard, discovered his mistake when I had the drop on him, but showed his panther claws, and I shot him."

"But I did not kill him then, but carried the plucky fellow on to the camping ground of the train, and though he suffered untold agony, he did not utter a groan."

"To my horror, I found that Kio Carl had escaped, and after burying Saul, who died an hour after reaching camp, I put the train on the right trail and came on here."

"You have done well, Cody, but why did you not go on to Omaha with the dispatches, and make this known on your return?"

Buffalo Bill smiled and answered:

"Because, colonel, my little game is not yet played out to the winning point."

"There is something else to tell, then?"

"No, sir; but to do."

"What do you mean?"

"I made an appointment with old Black Face."

"Ah!"

"I told him, in my then character of his renegade ally, Kio Carl, that the train was to be at Lone Tree at a certain time, and to there creep upon it, and attack it, while a squadron of troopers were then moving upon him, supposing him to be elsewhere than where he then was."

"I see."

"The Lone Tree, as you know, is a rise in the prairie, where there is a good stream of water, a thicket of cottonwoods, and that one large tree."

"Yes, I have camped there."

"The grass is deep surrounding it and the Indians can readily creep upon the camp and surprise it."

"True."

"Well, sir, I thought it would be a good idea to start out at once a couple of ambulances, a few wagons,

and several mounted men, and send them at once to the Lone Tree."

"To be surprised by the redskins?"

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"To surprise the redskins."

"I confess I am on a blind trail, Cody."

"The wagons and ambulances, sir, can be full of soldiers, and the horses can be those belonging to the troops. When they go into camp, the horses can all be saddled and ready for mounting, the soldiers lying in ambush, and when Black Face and his braves rush on the encampment, expecting to surprise a train with a few women and a half score of men, they can be met by half a hundred cavalymen."

"Cody, you are a trump!" cried the enthusiastic colonel.

"Then play me at the game with old Black Face, and from there I will go on to Omaha, with the dispatches, and only be about three days late, for tomorrow night is the time I appointed with the chief."

"But may not Kio Carl, who you say escaped from the train, have reached Black Face, and thus let the cat out of the bag?"

"No, sir, for I followed his trail, and it led southward, and, besides, as I started Black Face from his ambush in the timber, and have ridden hard myself, Carl cannot reach the redskins before they make their attack."

"Well, Cody, this is a glorious plan of yours, and I will send Captain Burr with you within an hour."

"We must start as soon as possible, sir."

"You shall, for you wish to strike the trail Markham's train would be on, so as to deceive the redskins, should they be on the watch. But may not the Markham train come along, too?"

"No, sir, for I told Mr. Markham my plan, and directed him how to proceed, and where to camp."

The colonel touched a bell, an orderly appeared, and he was sent after Captain Dangerfield Burr, a handsome, dashing cavalry officer, who readily entered into the plot, and used such dispatch in getting off that the sham settlers' train pulled out of Kearney in one hour after the arrival of Buffalo Bill at the fort.

The next day, gazing from a distant point, and concealed in a clump of cottonwoods, an Indian warrior was watching a small wagon train filing across the prairie.

His eyes sparkled as he observed its course, and instinctively he dropped his hand upon his scalping knife, as though in anticipation of the red deeds to be done when darkness settled down upon the face of the earth.

Toward a rise in the prairie, where was one large tree and numerous small ones, looking like a giant and his children, the train held its way, and within its shelter came to a halt, just as the sun touched the western horizon of the plain.

The Indian lookout still continued to gaze upon the glimmering white tilts of the wagons, lighted up by the last rays of the setting sun, and remained like a statue of bronze, his eyes riveted upon the scene,

until he saw the rosy hues of camp fires cast their radiance out from the thicket.

Then, wheeling his pony, he urged him to full speed, and for a few miles seemed to fly over the darkening prairie.

After a ride of half an hour he came upon a winding stream, the banks of which were fringed with cottonwoods, and down this he turned until he rode into dense timber, wherein were visible, like shadowy specters, the forms of horses and their riders.

"What has Good Eye to say?" asked a deep voice, as the Indian lookout sprang from his panting pony.

"The wheel tepees have camped in the shadow of the Lone Tree," was the calm reply, although from the manner in which the savage had ridden, it would have been more natural had he blurted out exactly the information he bore.

A satisfied grunt was uttered by the first speaker, and echoed by a score of others, and then came the question:

"How many wheel tepees?"

The Indian courier silently indicated the number by holding up as many fingers as there were wagons.

"The paleface spoke with a straight tongue. Let my braves mount their ponies and be ready."

It was the same one who had spoken before who gave the command, and as he rode out of the shadow of the timber upon the open prairie, the lingering light in the west revealed that it was Black Face, the Sioux chief.

As though he knew well the spot, he held his way

directly toward the Lone Tree, as the place was called where the Indian courier had seen the train go into camp.

A ride at a slow walk brought the band to the place where the lookout had sat upon his horse, gazing upon the train, and here a halt was made.

Dismounting, the Black Face securely tied his pony, and then looked to his arms, his example being followed by the others of the band.

"Let the Deer Foot and the Eagle go forward and see if the palefaces are asleep. We will wait their coming at the trail crossing."

The two braves, in obedience to the command of the chief, sprang away on foot and disappeared soon after in the darkness, while Black Face and his braves, also leaving their ponies behind them, under one guard, set off to follow them.

They had been gone but a few moments, when the thud of hoofs on the prairie attracted the attention of the Indian sentinel over the ponies.

Attentively he listened, and soon discovered that the sound grew more and more distinct, and that whoever it was, his course lay toward the timber where the ponies were concealed.

There was but one horse, he knew from the sound, and gliding to the edge of the timber toward which he was approaching, the warrior unslung his rifle and waited with a courage and calmness that it would be well for our soldiers to imitate in times of danger when nerve is most needed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNHEEDED WARNING.

Glancing out over the prairie, in the direction whence came the sound, the Indian guard's keen eyes soon caught sight of the form of a steed and rider approaching in the darkness.

The animal was keeping up the same steady gallop, and the rider did not seem to dread danger, from the manner in which he came on.

Presently, when within good gunshot range of the timber, he came to a halt and stood for an instant, evidently searching the length of the motte, as though to penetrate its dark depths and discover what awaited him there.

Then upon the air rose the sharp bark of the coyote.

It seemed to make no impression on the Indian guard, who remained as motionless as a stone.

Now came the long-drawn-out howl of the wolf, and still the Indian did not move, although it was evident that the strange horseman was giving signals by his imitations of wild beasts.

A moment of silence followed, and, clear and ringing, the notes of a night bird were heard.

Then the Indian guard moved; his hands went to his lips, and the last signal was answered by the sharp bark of the coyote, which would have fooled an animal of that species himself.

Instantly the horseman came forward toward the

timber, yet at a slow walk, and again halted within pistol range, and called out in the Indian tongue:

"Min-na-wash-te?"

"Wash-te," came the reply of the Indian, and the horseman rode up to the timber.

"Kio Carl!" cried the Indian, recognizing the horseman.

"My red brother speaks true, and I have come hard upon the trail of the Black Face," was the answer of the rider, as he sprang to the ground to give rest to his tired horse, whose drooping head showed that he had been pressed hard.

"The chief is on the red trail, as my white brother told him," answered the Indian.

"The Black Face is not here, then?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"The Bear Claw has spoken."

"His ponies are here," and Carl glanced around at the ponies hitched in the timber.

"The Bear Claw is their guard while the Black Face and his warriors have gone on the trail."

"But what trail, Bear Claw?" asked Kio Carl, evidently at a loss to understand the Indian.

"The trail of the wheel tepees."

"Is there a train near?"

"Did not the Kio tell the Black Face that the wheel tepees would camp at the Lone Tree, and that he must creep upon them as the snake in the darkness?"

"Redskin, you are badly off, for I told the Black Face no such thing."

"The paleface talks crooked now. Let him follow the trail of the Black Face. He will find him upon the prairie toward the Lone Tree."

"I'll go at once," said Kio Carl, leaving his horse in the timber, the same splendid animal which he had stolen from Madge Markham, and set out at a swinging trot upon the prairie.

He had gone about a mile when he suddenly stumbled over something in the deep grass, fell, and before he could resist was bound hand and foot.

"Is this the way for my red brothers to treat me?" he asked, in an injured tone, recognizing the braves of Black Face.

The Indians gave a grunt of surprise, cut his bonds at once, and sent for Black Face.

"The Black Face welcomes his white brother. Has he just come from the paleface camp?" said the chief in his dignified way, for an Indian shows dignity, even in cutting a throat.

"My brother's eyes are blind, his ears are not right, his feet follow the wrong trail," said Carl impressively.

"It is the trail my white brother told me to follow."

"Not so, chief, for I have been a prisoner, and the timber where I expected you to ambush the train, and sent you word by the White Panther, is far from here. Did not the White Panther see the Black Face?"

"Yes, and told him all the Kio had said; but does the Kio trifle with the Sioux?"

"No, it was all as I told the White Panther to

make known to you, but Buffalo Bill, the paleface Pa-e-has-ka"—here a general grunt was given, and there was a hand dropped on every knife hilt—"came to the train; told the chief I was the ally of my red brothers and I was seized and bound. But a paleface maiden, one who is yet to be my squaw, set me free, and I have come on the trail of the Black Face to tell him where to strike the wheel tepees."

The Indians, from the chief down, looked at each other in utter amazement, while Black Face said sternly:

"The Kio's tongue is crooked to talk so to the Sioux. They have eyes, and are not smitten by the Great Spirit here," and he placed his hand upon his head as a means of indicating that he was no fool.

"The Kio speaks true, and again tells the Black Face that the train is far from here."

"The Kio is like a snake, for he would strike his red brother, when he knows the wheel tepees are there," and he pointed toward the Lone Tree encampment.

"That is not the camp of my people," firmly said Kio Carl.

"The Kio tells lies," was the savage rejoinder, and the acquiescing grunt of the braves showed that they thought so, too.

Kio Carl dropped his hand upon his pistol, but realizing how unequal would be a combat, he said indifferently:

"There may be a camp there, and there is, for I see the fires, but it is not the camp of my people."

"Did not the Kio tell me they would be there?"

"No."

"Did he not tell me to come here with my braves and creep upon the wheel tepees in the dark?"

"No."

"Does the Kio say that he did not come to my camp and tell me this?" and it was evident that Black Face was waxing wroth.

"I do say so, for I have not been in the camp of the Black Face, nor near it, for months.

"I sent White Panther to you, to tell you what to do; but as I was taken prisoner, I could not follow out my plan, and having escaped now, I come to the Black Face to lead him upon the train of my people."

"Does the Kio think that the Black Face and his braves are blind, and have no ears, that he tells them that he came not to their camp two moons ago?"

"I did not, I only wish I could have done so."

"Yet he talked with the Black Face, and then returned to his people, and the White Panther went after him, and the Black Face is here to follow his words."

"Look here, chief, when was this?" suddenly asked Kio Carl, as the truth now flashed upon him.

"Two sleeps ago."

"By the Rockies! It was Buffalo Bill!"

"The great white chief hides not his face under hair," and Black Face referred to the beard of Kio Carl, who answered quickly:

"Yes, for he disguised himself to look like the Kio—put on his face a false beard. He has played with

the eyes and poured lies into the ears of the Black Face and his braves. The great Pa-e-has-ka has set you upon a wrong trail, chief, and laid a trap into which you are walking, for yonder train is not that of my people, for I left it far across the prairies, toward the setting sun."

"And the White Panther?"

"I have not seen him."

"The Kio has a deep heart, and he is throwing lies in the ears of the Black Face."

"I am not, chief."

"The Black Face does not trust him."

"All right, you infernally stubborn old redskin! Go your way and attack yonder train, and if you don't catch a tartar whose name is Buffalo Bill, you can set me down as the champion liar of the border, niggers, Chinese, and redskins included."

Black Face did not master all this, but he felt certain that he was being deceived.

He had, he believed, talked with Kio Carl face to face, and now he believed that he had some secret motive for not wishing to attack the train, and desired to fool him.

"The Black Face is no fool," he said savagely.

"You'll find you are, if you rush against that train, for I am sure it is some trick of that devil, Buffalo Bill, to get you into a death grapple."

"Let my warriors bind the Kio, and soon the Black Face will show him how crooked is his tongue."

"All right, chief. I'd rather be bound than go to fight yonder train," was the indifferent response of the

man, who having seen that his warning was unheeded, seemed wholly satisfied to let the Indians find out the truth of what he had told them in their own way, and he laughed at the surprise he felt they would receive, as he was assured that Buffalo Bill had laid a trap into which they were going to fall with the greatest of ease.

Without the slightest resistance, Kio Carl submitted to being bound and was then laid upon the prairie, with the quiet remark from Black Face:

"When the palefaces' scalps hang at the belts of my braves, and we come back for our ponies, the Black Face will return for the Kio."

"You don't mean to leave me here all alone, chief?" asked Kio, with quick alarm.

The chief nodded.

"Leave a brave with me."

"The knots of the bonds are tied."

"Still, I might escape."

"The Black Face will risk it."

"Chief, again I warn you not to attack that camp. It looks as though I had deceived you, but I have told you only the truth, as you will soon find out. Let one of your braves stay with me to set me free, when it is proven my words are true."

"No," and as the chief uttered the word the two warrior spies whom he had sent on ahead to reconnoiter, came up to him.

"What have my braves seen?" he asked.

"All the palefaces are asleep, and they keep no guard."

"Ugh! Now my paleface brother with the crooked tongue hears."

"Yes, and you'll hear more than you want to soon," muttered Kio Carl.

Leaving the renegade where he had been tied, Black Face called his warriors around him, and, silently as specters, they moved away in the darkness.

For a quarter of a mile they glided rather than walked along, and then Black Face called a halt and gave a few orders in a low tone, which were passed along the line of grim savages.

Then, down upon their faces they fell, and, like magic, disappeared from sight.

In the shelter of the few small trees surrounding the huge cottonwood were visible four smoldering camp fires that had been deserted for the night.

As the warriors, crawling like snakes through the grass, came nearer, their keen eyes detected on each side of the encampment what seemed to be a sentinel, leaning against a small tree. Quickly arrows were set to the Indians' bows, and soon each form had half a dozen shafts sent into it.

Without a groan from either, they sank upon the ground, and then, with yells that were enough to strike terror into the stoutest heart, Black Face and his warriors rushed upon the camp.

The chief himself, ever foremost in the fight, bent above the form of one of the guards to tear off the scalp, when a cry of surprise burst from his lips, as he found not a human being, but a suit of clothes, and that stuffed with prairie grass.

But ere he had time to ponder upon this strange circumstance, out from behind the wagons poured a perfect stream of fire, and down in their tracks fell a score of red men, dead or dying, while cheer upon cheer of the soldiers broke upon the air and spread dismay among the red ranks.

Black Face had just time to remember the warning given him by Kio Carl, and to realize that the renegade's tongue had not been crooked in that instance, when he saw rushing upon him a number of soldiers, with carbines and sabers, and quickly and loudly he called to his braves to rally around him.

They obeyed promptly and met the attack bravely, although taken wholly by surprise; but when, out of the thickets where the train horses were concealed, there dashed a score of cavalymen, with Buffalo Bill at their head, the savages gave one yell of terror, fired a volley at random, and bounded away over the prairie like a herd of deer.

With triumphant yells, the cavalry followed them, shooting them down here and there, and causing them, as the only means of safety, to scatter singly and in pairs, and thus continue their mad flight or hide in the long grass.

With a horseman in hot pursuit, Black Face had an opportunity of realizing how thoroughly he had been whipped and to mourn over the loss of two-thirds, if not all of his warriors, for he had seen that it would be a miracle almost if himself or any one of the band escaped.

As he ran along like a deer, holding his own pretty

well against the horse of his pursuer, he heard a cry, and in the Sioux tongue.

It was:

"Let my red brother free me from my bonds, that I may escape."

He recognized the voice, and saw instinctively, half seated on the ground, half hidden by the grass, the form of Kio Carl.

Though he knew well that he had told the truth, and understood what a terror in battle Kio Carl was, he dared not then hesitate an instant to free him, while the thought came into his mind to free himself at the cost of the renegade's life.

Instantly he changed his course and ran nearer the bound prisoner, to bring the pursuer upon him while following his trail, and as he dashed by, said:

"Let the Kio call upon his own people to set him free."

The next instant he had gone by like the wind.

But Kio Carl at once understood the dodge of the wily Indian, and, hearing the horseman coming, threw himself over and over again in somersaults, until he had gone many feet from where he had been lying.

Then he came to a halt and wormed himself along in the grass until he was almost wholly concealed from view.

Just at that moment, the one in hot pursuit of Black Face, whose form he could indistinctly see in the distance, dashed by, and not twenty feet away from where Carl was concealed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BUFFALO BILL'S DOUBLE DUEL.

For some moments after, Kio Carl lay motionless, as though he feared the coming of others.

But as he heard no sound near, and the shouts of the soldiers and the trampling of horses far off, with an occasional shot, a cheer, or a death yell, he rose again to a sitting posture.

His hands were bound behind his back, and a thong had connected them with his feet, which were also secured, so that he could not even stand upright.

Raising himself to a sitting position, he gazed around over the prairie, and could see dark forms of horsemen flitting here and there.

"They are pursuing some of the redskins toward the timber where they left their horses, but few can escape, I'll warrant," he muttered.

Toward the Lone Tree he saw that the camp fires had been rekindled, and numerous forms were seen passing to and fro in the light of them, showing that the soldiers had been in considerable force.

"Well, I know this is a trick of Buffalo Bill's, for he is up to just such plots, and he has hit old Black Face and his warriors hard, even if any of them gets away, which looks doubtful.

"Well, if Satan takes care of me, and I don't see why he should desert me now, I'll take good care to make all

the capital I can out of this, and the Indians will trust me, too, well remembering my warning and how it was treated. But how to get out of this trouble myself is the question."

That, indeed, seemed the question, and yet, bound hand and foot as he was, with no one near to free him, enemies on all sides and far from help, even should they not find him, Kio Carl did not despair.

Suddenly he dropped down in the grass, for he saw a horse and rider approaching.

The animal was seen coming on at a walk, his head bent as though he was tired, and his course would lead him directly over Kio Carl, unless he again rolled away.

But Kio Carl knew that he was in a desperate situation and that he must take desperate measures to escape.

It might be a soldier that was coming toward him, one who had gotten astray from his comrades in the chase after Black Face and his warriors, and it might be an Indian.

Perhaps it was a scout from the command of Captain Burr.

Then the blood rushed hard to Kio Carl's heart, as the thought flashed upon him that it might be Buffalo Bill.

If so, he made up his mind to take no chances.

But if it was any one else, he would, now having one arm free, risk a shot with his revolver.

If he killed the horseman, he would have his horse, saddle, and bridle, which would be everything to him as he then was.

"Salt Lake Saul has thrice saved my life and risked his own to do it, and it is my first duty to see what has become of him and to aid him if he needs it.

"If Buffalo Bill captured him, he will be taken to Omaha to be identified for the price set on his head, and then his career will be cut short. The Omaha authorities offer the reward, and therefore there he'll be taken, so to Omaha I go to look after Saul, for the girl will be safe enough at that far-away ranch her father is so foolish to take her to.

"So to Omaha I go, rig up in a new disguise, and then I can work in safety. Then, if I want aid, I will go to the village of Black Face, and see what I can do to get some braves to aid me, and, if I have not the influence with the reds, Salt Lake Saul has, and he'll be glad enough to help me if I save his neck.

"Come, old fellow, our trail leads to Omaha," he said to his horse, and the head of the animal was at once turned in that direction, while his rider again muttered as he rode along:

"If Buffalo Bill captured old Salt Lake Saul, he will go to Omaha to draw his reward, and I will be able to square accounts with him, as well as get my pard free, for, if that man was dead, I would have little to fear, as the soldiers would have no terror for me."

And, about the time Kio Carl came to this decision, the person of whom he was speaking was just leaving the Lone Tree camp on his ride to Omaha, to deliver to the commandant there the delayed dispatches. In the ambush fight by the Lone Tree Buffalo Bill had won the admiration of all the soldiers by his reckless

courage and the certainty with which he got every Indian he went for.

When the redskins scattered, he had pursued the larger force, most anxious above all things to capture Black Face, the daring chief who had so long been the bitter foe of the whites and had spread terror along the border by the raids he was wont to make with his picked warriors.

Still continuing to scatter, Buffalo Bill soon found himself in pursuit of but one redskin.

He was not mounted upon his own horse, having left him at the fort to rest, and the fugitive ran well, and seemingly untiringly, the nature of the ground being such that the scout's pony did not come up with him until a mile had been gone over.

Then, seeing that he would be overtaken and shot down, the redskin, panting from his tremendous race, grasped his tomahawk before he turned at bay, for he had thrown away his rifle to lessen his weight in running.

Then suddenly he paused, and the tomahawk, hurled with good aim, struck the scout's pony fairly in the head and brought him to earth with a suddenness that sent his rider far over his head.

Nimble as a cat, Buffalo Bill lighted upon his feet, and, just as he did so, grasped the Indian in his strong arms.

Expecting that the scout would fall with his horse, the Indian was taken by surprise, and, powerful though he was, Black Face was no match for the white man, especially as he was tired by his long run.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FUGITIVE STEED.

Buffalo Bill was no sparer of horse or human when he had his duty to do, and this held good on his ride to Omaha.

He did not care for himself, for he knew that he could stand any amount of fatigue, but he knew that his horse would fail him soon, and he looked about him to decide where he could get another animal.

He remembered a ranch on Beaver Creek, where he would likely be able to get a good horse, and thither he went, to find that the cabin had been burned and the cattle run off, and he knew that it had been the work of Black Face and his band.

But, as good luck would have it, just as his tired horse would carry him no farther, he spied an animal feeding some distance off.

A closer observation, and he gave a shout of joy, for he had been told by Mr. Markham that he had lost a beautiful thoroughbred, a claybank, noted for his speed and wonderful endurance.

The animal had slipped his halter one night and in the morning could nowhere be found.

Bill remembered the locality where Mr. Markham had told him he had lost the horse, and he knew it was not very far from where he then was.

The silver mane and tail, long and flowing, the per-

fect buckskin color of the animal, added to his trim build, told Buffalo Bill that he had found the lost animal, and just in the nick of time.

"'A fool for luck, and a poor man for children,' as the soldiers say at the fort, and I must be the former to carry out the saying, for I do happen to be most lucky. But now, if I can only catch that horse, I'll be willing to have luck go against me for the next month."

The animal now sighted the scout and instantly held his shapely head up, like a deer scenting danger.

Knowing that his own horse was too tired to go out of a walk, Bill at once turned him loose and hit him a blow to make him go some distance from him.

The horse trotted off some thirty paces, and the scout at once dropped down behind the bank of the creek, ran along for some distance, and crawled through the long prairie grass, directly to where his horse had halted and stood with drooped head, too tired to move.

He would have moved off, however, at seeing the form of the scout crawling in the grass, had he not been checked by a kind word, and in an instant Buffalo Bill was at his feet.

Gazing in the direction of the fugitive horse, the scout saw that it was approaching slowly and cautiously, now that it no longer saw the rider.

Crouching in the grass, his lariat in hand, he waited in breathless suspense the cautious and tardy approach of the beautiful animal, which had become quite wild in the few days he had been alone on the prairie.

Nearer and nearer he approached, and, as if in-

instinctively knowing what his master wanted, the scout's horse gave a low whinny.

The strange animal at once answered, and, encouraged, came trotting up to his new-found companion, to find himself suddenly struggling in the coils of a lariat.

A shout of triumph burst from the lips of Buffalo Bill at his capture, and in ten minutes he had the beautiful beast bridled, saddled, and in perfect control.

"I'll leave you, old fellow, to take care of yourself for a few days," he said kindly, to the animal who had served him so well, and throwing himself upon the claybank he darted away like an arrow from a bow.

Hardly had he disappeared over a rise in the prairie when a man arose from the prairie grass not far from the spot where the horse had been captured.

By his side lay his own steed, dead, having been ridden to death, and fallen in his tracks not ten minutes before Buffalo Bill came into sight.

His eyes also had caught sight of the claybank and recognized him, for the man was the treacherous guide of the Markham train.

And he, too, was plotting his capture when the sudden coming in sight of his enemy had thwarted his plans and caused him to witness the triumph of his hated foe.

Bitterly he cursed his ill fortune and the good luck of Bill Cody.

But, as cursing did not help him on the road to Omaha, he stripped his horse of his saddle and bridle, and, shouldering them, trudged along, his heart black

with passion and revengeful feelings toward the scout, whom he had not dared to risk a shot at or meet in fair combat, fearing the result.

Buffalo Bill found the claybank a better horse by far than he had anticipated, more than justifying all that Mr. Markham and Madge had said concerning him.

The animal had been presented to the maiden as a colt, and she had only ridden him once or twice, as, not being thoroughly broken, he had taxed her strength beyond endurance, and had run away with her, but for all that she had enjoyed his easy gait and fleetness, and had regretted his loss greatly.

In his new rider he found a master he readily yielded to, and Buffalo Bill was delighted with the ease and rapidity with which the beautiful animal carried him over the ground.

Halting now and then for rest, he found the horse ever ready to continue on the road, and he got to Omaha one night, half a dozen hours sooner than he had deemed possible.

Putting the horse up at the stable, the scout at once sought the commandant and delivered his dispatches, smiling at the remark:

"Well, Cody, you have not tarried by the way."

"You are mistaken, general, for I lost two days," was the response of Buffalo Bill, and he then told the general all the particulars of his trip and its interruptions.

"Well, Bill, if you would enter the army as a commissioned officer to do only frontier work, you would

wear the rank of general on your shoulders before three years, and I guarantee the Indian troubles would be far less frequent than they are now, for it needs just such men as you to deal with them."

"Thank you, general, but I prefer the free-and-easy life of a scout to the rank of a regimental commander, for as such I can render you good service free from red tape," responded Bill, with a smile.

"Egad, you are right; but as to this Markham and his train, for I met him just before he left: He is rather a superior man, is he not, to bury himself out upon the border on a cattle ranch?"

"So I think, sir, and his daughter is both lovely and refined, yet she seemed to love the wild life of the prairies, and I hope will have no cause to regret her coming."

"I sincerely hope with you, for her own sake. But as you have killed that devilish renegade, White Panther, there will be far less danger to settlers, I think."

"Kio Carl yet lives, sir."

"True, and I guess we can arrange here for a price on his head, too, and my word for it, you will claim the stakes."

"I don't care for blood money, general; but I'll do all I can to win any reward put upon the head of Kio Carl, for I have an old grudge against him and know he is my bitterest foe. When do you wish me to return, sir?"

"In two days, for I can send you as a guide for a supply train which goes to McPherson, if you care to accept the position."

"Certainly, sir, I will do anything that I can be useful in," and promising to see the general the next day, Buffalo Bill declined the invitation to put up at the barracks and wended his way into town to a hotel where he was well known to the proprietor.

He was just about to enter the saloon to look around for a familiar face, knowing well that it was the place to find any plainsman that might be in town, when the proprietor called him aside.

"Say, Bill," he said, in a whisper, "do you know the fellow known as Kio Carl?"

"I do."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"Out on the Loup."

"When?"

"Several days ago. But why do you ask, Dolan?"

"Well, a man came into the bar a little while ago, and he looked to me strangely like Carl, and I knew you would recognize him if anybody would, so I said nothing, but waited for you."

"Is he there now?"

"No, he has gone to the stables to see about his horses; but he has engaged a room and will soon return."

"I'll lay for him, and see if it is our man."

"Do so, Bill, for, to tell you the truth, a cattleman came in from the cottonwood some days ago, spent considerable money with the boys, and then started home considerably worse off for liquor, and this fellow I sus-

pect of being Kio Carl came in to-night upon a horse the match of the one the ranchero had, if it is not the very animal, but the saddle and bridle are not the same."

"Well, I would know Kio Carl if he was painted black and wore a woolly wig, and if he is the one who has engaged a room with you, I'll just trump his little game, whatever it may be."

"I know you will, Bill, and I'll keep watch for you, so as to post you when he comes in."

The landlord and Buffalo Bill now turned away from the window where they had been standing while talking, and as they did so, a tall form arose from the shadow outside and glided away in the darkness.

It was Kio Carl, and he muttered, as he turned and shook his fist at the hotel:

"You think you would know me, Buffalo Bill, under any disguise, do you? Well, we shall see if I cannot deceive even your eagle eyes."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SUDDEN DEPARTURE.

At the time of which I write, some years back, Omaha was rather a lively frontier settlement, far different from the handsome city of to-day.

It was then a border settlement, with soldiers, sutlers, traders, teamsters, cowboys, Indians, and last, but by no means least, Indian fighters and scouts, roving its streets.

There was also another class that was an important make-up of Omaha's citizens, or hangers-on, and that was the gambling fraternity, among whom were men who could handle a card with the skill of a "heathen Chineer," and back up any assertion against their honor with revolver and bowie.

The water of the Missouri not being very palatable, whisky was more largely patronized than the purer fluid, with the result that about one-fourth of the population were continually in a state of excitement, which only blood-letting could cool off.

It is needless to say that many got their blood cooled, and so summarily and decidedly that it remained so, and it was a regret with the better class of citizens that numerous others of the turbulent kind were not "snuffed out" also.

In this community, Buffalo Bill was well known to all, by name, if not personally.

He was noted as the scout of the border, the deadliest shot, best horseman, worst hand with the knife, and a man to stick to the trail of a bad Indian or foe with the instinct of a bloodhound and the tenacity of a bulldog.

A frank-faced, generous-hearted man, ever ready to help a friend or a stranger in distress, he had yet shown terrific tiger claws when brought to bay by those who wished to ride him down and rid the country of one they dreaded.

Upon entering the saloon, therefore, after his short chat with the landlord, Buffalo Bill was greeted with shouts of welcome and innumerable invitations to:

"Take suthin', Bill!"

Bill was considerably fatigued with his hardships of the past few days, and willingly acquiesced in the pressing invitation, by inviting all hands round to drink with him, as he said:

"Pards, I've got some hundreds of invitations to drink now, and if I accepted all, I'd get gloriously drunk, so we'll compromise by all drinking with me."

The compromise was accepted, and after paying the score, a by no means light one, Buffalo Bill took a seat at a table where he could face both doors and took up a paper to read.

Thus passed an hour or two, and, interested in the paper, he seemed utterly oblivious to the excitement and wild clamor about him, yet not a person came in at the door that he did not see, and observing the landlord approaching him, he said quietly:

"Well, Dolan, he has not come yet."

"Nor will he."

"What's up?"

"He has skipped."

"No."

"Fact, for he heard all we said."

"How did you know this?"

"I got tired of waiting for him to come, so went out to the stable and asked for him."

"Well?"

"Dan, my stableman, said he had seen him coming out there, when he stopped, turned back, and stood outside the window, while you and I were standing inside."

"Then he heard what we said?" was Buffalo Bill's quiet remark.

"Of course, and skipped."

"But where did he go?"

"Dan said he thought he had gone back into the house until he saw him steal away from the window, and then start up the street."

"He left his horse?"

"Yes."

"Did he leave anything in his room?"

"He had nothing to leave in the shape of luggage, though he had plenty of money, for I saw it when he asked me to join him in a drink."

"Describe him, please, Dolan."

"A tall man, with a beard cut short, no mustache, and dressed in black. He looked like an itinerant parson."

"Kio Carl was differently dressed, had a full beard and a mustache, long hair, and looked like the itinerant devil he is."

"But he could have cut off his mustache, cropped his beard and hair, and put on a black suit, for the one he wore was strangely like that the ranchero had on, of whom I told you."

"Yes, he's no leopard, and can change his spots; but I think I should know Kio Carl under any disguise—na, what's the row there?" and Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet and soon cleared a way through the crowd to where a little mischief was going on which he thought called for his interference.

The excitement was certainly above the average, in the Overland Saloon, to attract the attention of Buffalo Bill.

But, accustomed as he was to wild scenes, the oaths and loud voices, often in anger, of the crowd around him, he yet, in spite of seeming indifference, heard and saw much that was going on which few believed he noticed.

While talking with the landlord, and interested in the disappearance of the stranger, he suddenly heard, in pleading tones, the cry:

"Gentlemen, don't harm me, for I am only a poor cripple and a stranger in your town."

"Yer swallow ain't crippled, ef yer leg are, an' derned ef yer shan't take benzine with us, ef we has ter pour it down yer," said a rude voice in reply.

"Thet are so, pard, fer we asked him ter drink, an'

he refused jist ter insult us, an' he drinks, or I are a liar."

"But, gentlemen, I never drink, and surely you would not force me," was said in pleading tones, and many present were touched, yet dared offer no remonstrance, as the "gang" who had the stranger in their power were to be dreaded by those who wished to keep out of the grave.

The one they insisted should drink with them was a rather pitiable-looking object, and should have excited compassion in the heart of any one.

He was badly crippled, one leg seeming to be bent and drawn up, which made him painfully lame, while he stooped, and was humpbacked.

His face was smoothly shaven, his hair cut too short to comb, and his attire was evidently the cast-off clothing of some large man who had taken pity upon him.

He wore green spectacles, as though his eyes were affected, and evidently carried his worldly goods with him, for a ragged blanket and overcoat and a small bundle, with a handkerchief serving as carpetbag, hung on the end of a stick.

He had entered the hotel and asked the clerk for lodgings at half price, and been referred to the landlord, who was talking to Buffalo Bill at the bar.

Upon making the effort to reach Landlord Dolan, he had been spied by the "Terrors," as the gang who seized him were called, and his strange appearance at once excited their ridicule instead of their compassion.

"Say, pard, heur's a what-is-it: so let's hev a leetle fun!" cried the discoverer of the poor wretch.

"What'll yer take fer it, Tom?" asked another.

"It ain't fer sale, fer I are going ter travel with it and skeer Injuns off ther earth."

"Whar did yer ketch it, Tom?"

"It hed clum a tree an' pulled it up arter it, when I shooted, an' down it dropped. See; I hit it thar fust an' broke its leg, an' next time I struck it squar' in ther back, an' yer see ther swelling haven't yit gone down."

All this time Terror Tom had the cripple by the shoulder with an iron grip, wheeling him around for inspection and referring to the deformity of his back when he spoke of the "swellin' not hevin' gone down."

"Give it a drink, Tom!" cried one.

"Yas, see if it guzzles lickier."

"Pour benzine down him an' set him on fire ter see him skip lively."

"Waal, I'm durned ef I don't pickle him with a leetle fire water, fer fear he may spile. Come, hum'back, take a glass of sperits."

"I never drink, sir," faintly said the cripple.

"Waal, yer does, when I shouts treat!" responded the enraged bully, in a savage tone.

"No, sir; I am bad enough deformed, God knows, without being a drunkard," was the reply.

"Furies, he are a-preaching, or I are drunk!" shouted one.

"I am no preacher, sir; only I do not drink."

"I say yer does, he says yer does, as ther school

grammar says, an' yer has ter obey, or I'll trim thet knapsack yer carries on yer back," was the brutal remark.

All the crowd had now gathered around, attracted by the strange cripple and his persecutors, and seemingly in terror, he gave vent to the appealing cry that had attracted the attention of Buffalo Bill.

Forcing his way through the crowd, he soon stood in front of the poor wretch, and then a silence fell upon them all, for the scout was recognized, and it was evident that he intended taking the part of "the under dog in the fight," as it was his custom to do.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DEFENDING A CRIPPLE.

"Well, my friend, what seems to be the matter?"

Buffalo Bill addressed the poor cripple, and spoke in a kindly tone as he stepped in front of him, where he stood cowering under the heavy clutch of Terror Tom upon his shoulder.

"I am but a poor cripple, sir, and a stranger in town, and these gentlemen wish to force me to take a drink."

"They will not make you drink if you do not wish to."

"Oh, yes, they will, for they say so!"

"Men don't always do all they threaten," was the quiet response of Buffalo Bill, and then he asked:

"Have you no friends in town?"

"No, sir; nor in the world. I am all alone."

This was said in a tone sufficient to touch almost any heart; but the bullies only laughed, and one of them broke out in song with:

"I'm lonely since my friends all died."

A laugh followed this musical burst, and, wheeling upon the singer, Buffalo Bill said sternly:

"You'll sing another song, Dagger Dave, if you don't let this poor fellow alone, and I mean it for all of your bullying gang."

All drew their breath and waited, for these bold words of Buffalo Bill's showed his utter defiance of

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the Terrors, and was as much as a challenge for them to accept if they so willed.

"And what song mout that be, Buffalo Bill?" asked Dagger Dave, who had won his name through always carrying a long Spanish dagger, upon the hilt of which his hand now dropped.

"'Do they miss me at home?' or words to that effect," replied Buffalo Bill, with a light laugh, and, half turning to Terror Tom, he continued when the laugh subsided:

"Terror Tom, take your hand off that poor fellow."

"Is you my master, Buffalo Bill, to give orders?"

"This man is no match for any one of you, as you know; he is a stranger and a cripple, and I will not see him imposed upon by any gang of bullies such as I know you to be."

These were hard words, and the only surprise of the crowd was that the Terrors did not then and there spring upon Buffalo Bill.

But they were at heart cowards, and each one knew that at least one, if not more, of them would die; for Buffalo Bill was as quick as lightning in drawing a weapon, and as deadly as death in using it, and which one of them would fall none could tell, and that very circumstance made them go slow.

"I'll show you who is master if you don't let go that man, Terror Tom. You may run Omaha, because the people don't want trouble with you, but you can't impose on that poor wretch while I am here."

Terror Tom glanced at his two comrades, and then, as he knew he must do something or "take water"

before hundreds whom he had bullied and who feared him, he tightened his grip upon the shoulder of the cripple, while he cried:

"I'll cl'ar ther room fer action, Buffalo Bill, so out ther window goes yer pet, fer fear he mout get hurt in ther scrimmage that are to be."

Terror Tom was a man of herculean build, and the cripple, drawn up, bent, and lame, did not come up to his shoulder, and it looked as though "out of the window" he must go, if the bully made the effort to pitch him out.

And make the effort Terror Tom did, but to the surprise of all, before he could swing the cripple from his feet, he received a blow in the face that sent him to earth with a shock that shook the house, and stunned him, too.

And it was the cripple who gave the blow, straight out from the shoulder, full in the brutal face, and with a force that was terrible.

Buffalo Bill had sprung forward to aid the cripple; but seeing that, if driven to it, he was able to take care of himself, he turned, as a shot was heard and a bullet passed through his hat.

It was the last shot that man ever fired, for before he could draw trigger a second time, Buffalo Bill dropped him dead in his tracks with his revolver, and then, turning just in time, caught the knife of Dagger Dave upon his weapon, snapped the blade, and, seizing his assailant in his strong arms, threw him bodily out of the window, carrying sash with him, with a crash and jingle that was deafening.

"There's another window for you, Terror Tom!" cried Buffalo Bill, seizing the king bully as he was scrambling to his feet and dragging him to the window.

"Carry the sash with you, Tom," he continued, and, with an exhibition of his marvelous strength which raised a yell of admiration from the crowd, he hurled the giant bully through the other window into the yard, giving him a fall of several feet, and sending him to join Dagger Dave, who was collecting himself together for flight, gashed with glass, bleeding, and thoroughly cowed.

"Run, pards, Buffler Bill are comin' ter bury yer this time!" yelled a spectator out of the window, and the two desperadoes quickly made tracks toward the stable, dazed, bleeding, and utterly unable to account for the way it all occurred.

"Pard, you can hit as hard as a government mule can kick, and that is saying volumes. Give me your hand for the neat way in which you sent Terror Tom to earth, and tell me your name," said Buffalo Bill, stepping toward the cripple, who, after his knockdown of Terror Tom, stood as innocently by as though an uninterested spectator of the affair.

"My name is Cripple Kit," he said, in soft tones, almost womanly in their sweetness.

"You were not christened Cripple Kit?" answered Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"No, sir, but I am such a deformity I soon got the name, and it has stuck to me through life, and will doubtless be put on my tomb, if I get one," was the sad reply.

"Where do you hail from?"

"The East."

"And have you come West to live?"

"It looked a while ago as though I had come West to die, and if it had not been for you, I fear they would have killed me, and, deformed as I am, I love life."

"Most people do; what do you expect to go at out here?"

"Anything I can get to do."

"Well, I'll see if I can help you. Come, gentlemen, let us have a drink, and, Dolan, please have that poor fellow buried at my expense, and send in the bill for your windows, too," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the man he had slain, whose body lay in the corner where it had fallen, a bullet in his brain.

"Never mind the glasses, Bill, for it was worth the expense to see you break them with Dagger Dave and Terror Tom, and as for Flighty, the town will bury him, and give you a vote of thanks for giving it the opportunity.

"Pard, you'll join Bill, I s'pose?" and Dolan turned to Cripple Kit, who answered:

"No, thank you; I never drink."

"Then don't tech it, pard," said a man with a very red face and enlarged nose, "fer it are a dern good rastler, an' I hes yet ter see ther galoot it can't down in a reg'lar stand-up meetin'. A leetle rye straight, boss," and the individual who had started out on a temperance lecture to Cripple Kit ended his harangue

by taking "four fingers" undiluted, and with a smack of relief he added:

"I drinks a leetle myself, Cripple Kit; it are my custom never to desert a old friend, an' spirits an' me has been acquainted too long fer me ter go back on 'em when I are hastenin' ter ther tomb—fill ther glass up again, boss, thet I may propose a toast ter Buffler Bill."

This ingenious device to get a second drink "ter keep t'other from bein' lonesome," was successful, and all stood ready with their glasses, while Temperance Jerry—so called from preaching and never practicing—cried in stentorian tones:

"Pards, heur are to Buffler Bill, ther king of scouts, an' a man who never desarted the trail o' a friend or a foe."

The toast was drunk with gusto, and in the excitement that followed Buffalo Bill, Cripple Kit, and Landlord Dolan left the saloon to the noisy revelers.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A HOME FOR CRIPPLE KIT.

The scene in the saloon created quite an excitement in Omaha, and made Buffalo Bill far more of a hero than ever before.

His having killed one of the terrors and squelched the others, for they had not been heard of since the fracas, added to the purity of the atmosphere in town.

Early the next morning he went on the search, and set a score of trusty men at the same work, for Kio Carl; but nowhere could the renegade be found.

The horse he had ridden into Omaha was proven to be the property of the ranchero, for his dead body had been found by the trail side, a bullet in his brain, and his clothing gone.

It was evident that his murderer had robbed him and then taken his clothing, and, as his suit tallied with the one worn by the man whom Dolan, the landlord, had suspected was the renegade, it seemed beyond cavil that he was right in his suspicion.

The horse still remaining in the stable proved that the owner, or, at least, the one who had left it there, was afraid to show himself to claim his alleged property.

Two days after the arrival of Buffalo Bill in Omaha a courier arrived from Fort Laramie, and he was at once sought out by the scout, who knew him well.

A Home for Cripple Kit.

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It was Texas Jack, a scout and plainsman, who has, like Buffalo Bill, won a name that will live long in song and story.

"Well, Bill, I was just about to strike your trail, for I have a message for you.

"How are you, old pard?" and Texas Jack grasped the outstretched hand of Buffalo Bill with the grip of true friendship.

"I'm glad to see you, Jack, and suppose you have come by McPherson and Kearney, and are just from Laramie?"

"Yes, I came through on the jump, and start back to-morrow. I stopped over at both McPherson and Kearney, and saw the boys just coming in, after your fight at Lone Tree. They were full of talk about you, Bill, and boasting over your little plan to wipe out old Black Face—but is this a friend of yours, Bill?" and Jack turned to Cripple Kit, who had come up with Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, Jack, and a good fellow he is. Cripple Kit, this is my friend, Texas Jack, of whom you have heard."

The two men grasped hands and Jack said in his free-and-easy style:

"Glad to see you, sir; but, Bill, the boys gathered in just thirty-seven scalps that morning after the Lone Tree fracas, and are betting that you took four or five. I took odds that you belted half a dozen top-knots, for I know you, Bill, so tell me if I win or lose?"

"You win, Jack," was the quiet reply.

"How many?"

"Seven."

"You were in it thick, but that's your style."

"No, but we gave them a direct surprise, and the Indians were thick, and I could not miss," modestly replied Bill.

"They found Black Face, but his hair was gone."

"Yes, I got it."

"Well, there was another villain who got away."

"Who was that, Jack?"

"That renegade, Kio Carl."

"He was not there."

"You are mistaken, Bill."

"No, he escaped from the Markham train, stole the horse of the one who let him go, and struck south, for I followed his trail for a short distance."

"It was a blind, for he doubled on his trail, and a wounded Indian said that he came up and told Black Face the camp at Lone Tree was a trap; but the chief had been fooled so cleverly by you in playing the renegade that he did not believe Kio, swore that he had some motive in keeping him from attacking the train, so bound him and left him on the prairie."

"And he was captured?" cried Buffalo Bill eagerly.

"Not he; Satan took care of him, for he escaped somehow."

"Now, tell me if you know anything about the Markham train."

"Yes; it was going all right to the ranch when I met it. And, Bill, isn't Miss Markham a beauty?"

"She is a very lovely lady, Jack."

"She thinks a great deal of you, for she told me so."

"Much obliged for her good opinion of me."

"And her old father just swears by you."

"You are full of blarney, Jack; is there anything you want me to do for you?" laughed Buffalo Bill.

"Yes."

"Name it."

"Go back with me as far as McPherson."

"Can't do it, for I carry a train back, that goes clear through to Denver."

"Too bad, for I hoped for your company."

"But you can do something for me, Jack."

"I'm your man, Bill."

"My friend here, Cripple Kit, as he calls himself, wants to go on a ranch as a cowboy."

"He is a good rider, in spite of his lameness, and I will send him to Mr. Markham, who asked me to send him several good men for his ranch, and I want you to drop him there as you go by, for he is no plainsman to find the way alone."

"I'll do it, but his horse must be a good one, as I go fast, Bill, as you know."

"It will try your horse to keep up with the one he rides, for I gave him, to take back to Mr. Markham, a claybank that got away from the train, and which I caught on my way here, and I will frankly say that I never backed a better horse for speed or wind."

"Well, I'll be glad of Kit's company, I assure you, and I start to-morrow at dawn on the return."

And at break of day the following morning Texas Jack started on his way back to Fort Laramie, with Cripple Kit for his companion, and mounted upon the splendid claybank horse.

In his pocket he carried a letter to Mr. Markham from Buffalo Bill.

This letter of recommendation the scout told Cripple Kit to read and then hand to Mr. Markham, who, without doubt, would give him a place in his home, and the friendless fellow seemed overjoyed at the prospect.

CHAPTER XL.

THE THIRD MEETING.

Buffalo Bill had not forgotten his pledge to Salt Lake Saul, regarding the wishes of the dying renegade as to what he wished him to do with the papers he told the scout he would find in his belt.

Examining the papers while at Omaha, Buffalo Bill found that they told the story of a very evil life, and there were documents of a legal nature which had been stolen, and were most important in righting a wrong.

Salt Lake Saul had been most anxious to right this wrong, and had seemed pleased when Buffalo Bill had promised to aid him.

Seeing the value of the contents of the belt, Buffalo Bill had sought the adjutant and chaplain of Fort Omaha and placed in their hands the carrying out of Salt Lake Saul's wishes, so that justice could be done, and it may be said here that it was faithfully done by the two officers to the scout's satisfaction.

After another couple of days spent in Omaha, Buffalo Bill started out in charge of the train the colonel had spoken to him about and which was going to seek a settlement near the ranch of Mr. Markham.

Buffalo Bill safely guided the train to its destination, and then going to the ranch of Mr. Markham, was much pleased to find that Kit had arrived there in safety, had been warmly welcomed and had already begun to feel at home.

As for Kit, he was happy in his new home, he told the scout.

The welcome Buffalo Bill got was a most cordial one.

Aunt Phyllis did her best cooking for him, while, with the scout as his hero, the youth, Pepper, begged to become one of his brave band of men in buckskin, a request Cody readily granted.

"You saved us, Cody," said Mr. Markham feelingly; and he added:

"Yes, our safety was assured, and the doom of those evil men sealed the moment we were protected, and they were shadowed by Buffalo Bill, the sure shot."

Grasping the scout's hand warmly, Madge said earnestly:

"Yes, and my foolish act forced you into another death grapple, which, but for your sure shot, would have cost you your life. I shall never forget all that I owe to you, Buffalo Bill."

After a few days spent pleasantly with the Markhams, Buffalo Bill took his departure to return to the fort, where he was chief of scouts.

"I have but one dread, Mr. Cody, and that is that Kio Carl is yet at large," said Mr. Markham, as he bade the scout good-by.

"Kill him as you would a snake, sir, for he will be merciless, and be on the watch, for it would not surprise me if he came here in disguise," answered the scout, and with a wave of his hand he rode away.

Watching him from the piazza, they saw another horseman riding slowly toward him.

As the two approached, there was a quick movement upon the part of each horseman, Buffalo Bill spurring forward suddenly.

Then two shots rang out, and the stranger reeled and fell from his saddle.

In dismay at the tragic scene, those watching saw the scout dismount, raise the limp form in his arms, and throw it across the saddle, then remounting, he came back toward the ranch.

"Mr. Markham, you need no longer fear Kio Carl, for he is dead, as you see. He was disguised as a preacher, spectacles, smooth face, and clothes, but I knew him at a glance, as I was sure that I would. Will you kindly bury him, for I must go at once," and Buffalo Bill continued on his trail, while Madge Markham said:

"And Mr. Cody told him, you remember, to beware of their third meeting—I feel safe, now."

And as he rode on his way, Buffalo Bill mused:

"The Black Face, the White Panther, and now Kio Carl—the worst trio on the border."

THE END.

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