BILLY DIXON

LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF 'BILLY' DIXON

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Life and Adventures of 'Billy' Dixon / A Narrative in which is Described many things Relating to / the Early Southwest:

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Frederick Samuel Barde Life and Adventures of 'Billy' Dixon / A Narrative in which is Described many things Relating to / the Early Southwest

CHAPTER I

In no other country could there have been found a region so inviting, so alluring, so fascinating, to the spirit of adventure as the Great Plains. How it gripped the imagination of young men, sons of pioneers, between the Mississippi and the Alleghanies, in those early days! How it called to them, and beckoned to them to forsake their homes and journey westward into the unknown!

Vast and undisturbed, it stretched from the British Possession to the Rio Grande. It was a natural stage on which was enacted the most picturesque and romantic drama of the nineteenth century. Its background was the Rocky Mountains, from whose towering ramparts the Plains swept down toward the east, giving

an unobstructed view of the stirring panorama that for more than half a century was unrivalled for its scenes of daring and conquest.

The Plains were marvelously adapted to the needs of uncivilized people, who derived their sustenance from the bounty of the wilderness and to the heavy increase and perpetuation of the animal life upon which they subsisted. Upon its level floors, enemies or game could be seen from afar, an advantage in both warfare and hunting. The natural grasses were almost miraculously disposed to the peculiarities of soil and climate, affording the richest pasturage in the green of summer and becoming even more nutritious as the seasons advanced toward the snows of winter. This insured the presence of enormous numbers of herbivorous animals, such as the buffalo, the antelope and the deer, from which the Indian derived his principal food and fashioned his garments and his shelter. His only toil was the chase with its splendid excitement, and his only danger the onslaught of tribal enemies. The climate was healthful and invigorating. In all the world could not have been found a more delightful home for primitive men.

That the Indian should have resisted with relentless and increasing ferocity every effort to drive him from this paradise was natural and justifiable from his point of view. In those days, he felt that to go elsewhere meant starvation and death for his family and tribe. Above all, he firmly believed that the country was his, as it had been from the beginning, and that the white man

was cruel, merciless and wrong in depriving him of his old home – a home that the white man did not need and would not use.

North and south across this gigantic stage the teeming animal life of the Plains, especially the buffaloes moved regularly with the procession of the equinoxes. The first grass of spring to which the Cheyennes gave the poetic name, *mah-nah-see-tah*– had scarcely made green the landscape before it was darkened with moving herds northward bound, in obedience to the primal instinct that pulses more deeply with the coming of spring. The pastures were endless, and the moist earth vibrant with the sounds of the fresh season. Everywhere wild flowers were springing from the sod. The water-holes were full, and the sandy rivers flashing in the sunshine. Clouds of water-fowl swirled and descended upon the bars, to rest in their flight to their nesting grounds. The eagle in the sky and the lark in the grass were alike free to raise their young, far from the intrusion of man. The Indians, with their women, children, dogs and ponies, moving dimly on the far-off Plains, were native to the scene, and passed unnoticed by the other denizens of the solitude.

Once more the pageant of the wilderness moved on its mysterious way, this time from north to south. The storms of spring and summer had rolled their thunder through the solitude and reddened the sky with their lightning. The rains had spent themselves. The season of creation and growth had passed. The Plains were shaggy with brown grass. Soon frost would sharpen the air, and snow come on the cold winds and whiten the earth.

The buffaloes, the deer and the antelope had thicker and warmer coats; the bear was growing drowsy, and hunting his winter cave; the wild turkey flashing a finer bronze; the prairie chicken, the crane, the mallard and the goose were fat and succulent beyond other days.

Of all this domain the Indian was lord and master. There was none to dispute his sway. The stars in the sky were his night companions, and the sun his supreme benefactor by day. All were his servants. His race multiplied and was happy. Food and shelter were to be found upon every hand. The white man had not come, bringing disease and poverty.

In savagery, a more delightful existence could not be found. What joy of physical living, with strength, health and contentment in every village. There were wars, to be sure, but feats of daring appealed to the brave, and there was love of fame and honor, just as there was inside the walled cities beyond the Atlantic, where, from a comparative standpoint, men were less civilized than their western brothers who fought with bow and arrow, war club and tomahawk.

The fruitful summers were given over to idling in pleasant places – in a village beside a stream, or in the foothills of the mountains. There was singing and dancing and the telling of old tales. The women looked after the household, ever watchful of the little girls and the young women of marriageable age. The plaintive notes of the love-flute could be heard in the dusk of twilight. The warriors trained the boys and the young men in

horsemanship and the use of arms, subjecting them to tests of physical endurance, even pain, that they might grow to be strong, invincible men.

There is something beyond description that clutches a man's heart and imagination in the Plains country. Whether it is the long sweep of the horizon, with its suggestion of infinity, touching upon melancholy, or that wide-arching expanse of sky, glittering by night and glorious by day, may not be determined, yet no man is ever quite his former self after he has felt deeply the bigness, the silence and the mystery of that region.

Trackless and boundless, the Great Plains at first offered to the adventurous traveler the many dangers that come from losing one's way in the wilderness. The sun and the stars were guides for direction, but not for water, wood and pasture. Travel was not made certain and continuous until countless feet and hoofs and wheels had worn trails. The making of trails is one of the most primitive acts of man, and it seems incredible that this should have been done within such recent times in this country. The most noted of all these trails was the Santa Fe Road or Trail that led to Santa Fe, New Mexico, from Westport, Mo., where it was joined by smaller highways from points in the surrounding country.

The heart swells with emotion at remembrance of the wild, free life along those old trails, and knowledge that they have vanished forever brings a feeling of deep regret. Railroads, to be sure, meet modern needs, and have changed the wilderness into

gardens, but, nevertheless, beyond and above all these demands of a higher civilization, with its commerce and its feverish haste, remains the thought that something worth while has been lost, at least to those who found joy in braving dangers and in overcoming the obstacles of primitive conditions. What a living, moving, thrilling panorama stretched along the old trails! How vast the wealth that rolled past!

The end came when the Santa Fe railroad reached Raton in 1880. Thenceforward, wind and rain and the encroaching grass began their work of obliteration. Only gashed river banks and scarred hillsides guard from the destroying years the last vestiges of what once were a nation's highways. The snow-swept summits of the Spanish Peaks look down no more upon the crawling ox-trains, nor does the swart Apache watch stealthily on Rabbit Ear Mountain to see if a weakly guarded train is coming down the Santa Fe Road. There are two pretty Spanish names for Spanish Peaks – "Las Cumbres Espanolas" and "Las dos Hermanas," (The Two Sisters). The Ute name is "Wahtoya" (The Twins).

CHAPTER II

I was born in Ohio County, West Virginia, September 25, 1850, the oldest of three children. My mother died when her third child was born. I was then ten years old. I believe that the earliest remembrances of one's mother make the deepest impression. In the few years that I received my mother's care, my character was given a certain trend that it never lost. My mother told me that I should always be kind to dumb animals, and especially to birds. In all my after life I never forgot her words. Often on the Plains and in the wilderness did I turn my horse or wagon aside rather than injure a road lizard or a terrapin that was unable to get out of the way.

When I was twelve years old my father died, and with my sister I went to live with my uncle, Thomas Dixon, who lived in Ray County, Missouri. In those days travel was difficult, and Missouri seemed a long way from our home in West Virginia. We had been with our uncle only a few months when my sister was stricken with typhoid fever, and died after an illness of about two weeks. This left me alone in the world. My uncle was kind and good to me, but I stayed with him only a year. I was a strong, rugged boy, unwilling to be dependent upon even a kinsman for my living, and with much resolution I decided to seek my own fortune.

While at my uncle's home I had often met men who had been

to the far west, and their marvelous tales of adventure fired my imagination, and filled me with eagerness to do what they had done. My dreams were filled with beautiful pictures of that dim region that lay toward the Rocky Mountains.

In those days no traveler undertook this westward journey without a horse and a gun. I was penniless, and the purchase of these necessities seemed utterly beyond my resources.

I had formed the acquaintance of a boy named Dan Keller, several years older than myself, and also without father or mother. Many times had we talked of the wild country where game abounded and Indian warriors rode as free as the wind. That we should go was as inevitable as the coming of the grass in spring or the falling of leaves in autumn. My uncle would have been greatly opposed to our enterprise had we told him of it, so I went away without telling him good bye.

Having no horses, Dan and I started on foot, and in place of guns we had only courage and our chubby fists. In a sack on my back I carried my one extra shirt and my mother's photograph. The latter I treasured beyond all my other possessions. Making our way to the Missouri River we fell in with some wood choppers who were supplying with fuel the steamboats that in those days plied that river. The camps of these wood choppers were found at frequent intervals along the shore. The men were rough but generous and hospitable, and we were welcomed at their camps, many of which we reached at night-fall. We hunted and trapped up and down the river for several months, often

staying in one camp for a couple of weeks.

We were beginning to see the world and to find adventure. Around the campfires at night the wood choppers told of their exploits in the west – of how they had hunted the grizzly bear, the buffalo, the panther, the deer and the antelope, of how they had been caught in the howling blizzards, of their narrow escapes from drowning in swollen rivers, and of the battles they had fought with hostile Indians. Many times we sat and listened until midnight, the rush of the river sounding in our ears, and then after we had gone to bed we lay looking at the stars and wondering if it would ever be possible for us to lead such a delightful life.

Following the wood cutters' camps up the great river we finally reached Westport, Missouri, near where Kansas City now stands. We arrived there on Sunday, October 23, 1864, just as a big battle was being fought between the Union army under General Alfred S. Pleasanton and the Confederate army under General Stirling Price. We could hear the roar and boom of the cannon and see the clouds of smoke rising in the sky. Dan and I would have enlisted on the spot had we not been too young. But the smoke of battle got into our nostrils, and we were more determined than ever to reach the far west and fight Indians.

Proceeding northwest, we crossed the Kaw River and found ourselves in Kansas. At that time there were a few warehouses along the banks of the Missouri River where the Kansas City stock yards are now situated. We halted a day or two at the little town of Wyandotte. I remember how the surrounding country

was filled with mink, raccoon, rabbits, opossums, squirrels, quail and prairie chickens. This was greatly to our liking, so Dan and I hired to an old farmer near Wyandotte, and remained with him a couple of months.

The first signs of spring were now in the air, and like the wild geese that were passing northward, we resumed our migration. At the end of many weary miles we reached Leavenworth, Kansas, and after forming the acquaintance of an old plainsman named Tom Hare, fire and brimstone could not have turned us back, so determined did we become to plunge deep into the wild country that lay beyond us. Hare was a driver in a Government bull train.

Drifting into town hungry and foot-sore, I will never forget this old man's kindness. He took us to a railroad mess house – the Kansas Pacific grading camp was then at Leavenworth – and gave us our breakfast. While we were eating the old man watched us attentively and seemed pleased with our appearance. In a moment he was telling us of some of his trips in the west, which was like setting out fire in dry stubble. He said that the outfit or bull train to which he belonged was in camp about four miles from town. It was in need of hands, and if we wanted to go on the next trip he would help us get employment, advising us to remain with him until the bull train was ready to start. The outfit was waiting for winter to break up.

We immediately became the old man's staunch friends and ardent admirers. We went out to the camp and when we were taken to the boss, he eyed us carefully and said: "You boys are

pretty young, and Bill looks like he ought to be at home with his mother, but I'll give you a chance." So he hired us then and there at $50 a month, with everything furnished, including guns and ammunition. Dan and I were immensely proud of ourselves, and looked forward to the journey with eager expectancy. I was only fourteen years old, but delighted with the prospect that at last I should begin the journey across the Plains.

We got orders about April 15 to pull out for Fort Scott, Kansas. We moved by easy marches and reported to the quartermaster when we reached Fort Scott. He ordered the outfit to go into camp a few miles from town on a small stream where there was good grass and water for the stock. There we were to await further orders. We were in camp for two weeks, and all we had to do was to look after the stock, which we did in turns. The stream abounded in fish, and everywhere there was lots of small game. These were among the happiest days of my life. Because of my youth, the men favored me in many ways. I hunted and fished to my heart's content.

I was disappointed that the bull train had been sent south instead of west, but still hoped the order would soon come for us to move toward the Plains. This was in April, 1865, and in southern Kansas the news of President Lincoln's assassination had just been received. I recall that on our way to Fort Scott a black flag of mourning hung on every settler's farmhouse.

One morning about the first of May there was shouting among the men, the rattling of chains, the creaking of heavy wagons,

and the lowing of oxen, as we assembled under orders to proceed to Fort Leavenworth. We moved away in high spirits across the beautiful country, bright and fragrant with the wild flowers of spring. Lawrence was the first town of importance that we reached.

It was the custom of the bull-whackers to make a lively demonstration whenever they passed through a town. With their big sixteen foot whips they could make a sound like the crack of a rifle, and as rapidly as possible the whips were cracked, the drivers shouting to their oxen, while men, women and children ran into the street to witness the spectacle. It was a performance that everybody thoroughly enjoyed, and which never again will be seen in this western country.

In two days from Lawrence we came to Leavenworth City, about three or four miles south of Fort Leavenworth. Here we made the same uproar. Liquor was more plentiful than water at Leavenworth in those days, and many of the bull-whackers "tanked up." There was a big noise all the way to the fort.

Between Lawrence and Leavenworth the country was well settled, and every farm-yard was filled with chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese, many of which disappeared about the time we passed that way. Of course I would not be willing to admit that I helped steal any of them, but it would be useless for me to say that I did not help eat from many a well-filled pot. A fat pig that strayed near our camp rarely ever got back home. It is but just to say, however, that this taking of private property was done largely

in a spirit of mischief, as these rough bull-whackers could not have been induced to engage in what would have been regarded as actual stealing.

This outfit was made up of men of various ages and occupations. Some had been soldiers, and several had been sailors. I reveled in the stories told by the old gray haired men. I believe that I liked best of all their stories about fighting Indians.

Like all frontier towns, Leavenworth City was well supplied with saloons. It is not surprising that in the West most men drank, as the saloon was the main starting place for an outfit like ours, and a man who did not take at least one drink was considered unfriendly. I wish to emphasize this last word, for my statement is literally true. Inviting a man to drink was about the only way civility could be shown, and to refuse an invitation bordered upon an insult. Again, the saloon was the place where all trails crossed, and there we might be sure of meeting men from the north, from the west and the south, and gaining information that was so essential to those who were journeying into far off places.

The outfit was ordered into camp near the fort, with everybody planning for the westward trip. Our chagrin and disappointment may be imagined when we learned that the whole train was to be sold by the Government, to which it belonged. The country was now green with growing grass, and the cattle were getting sleek and fat. The orderly came and told us to assemble the train in front of the quartermaster's office. The wagons were strung out one after the other until they formed a line half a mile

in length. An auctioneer stood in front of the building and cried the sale; as soon as one wagon and team was sold another took its place. The teams were bought in at from $1600 to $1800 each, wagons included, and the twenty-five wagons and three hundred bulls were bought by one man; his name was Kirkendall. He had been master of transportation at Fort Leavenworth. Kirkendall hired our train-master, and he in turn hired all the men who wanted to remain with the outfit. About half the men quit, and their places were filled with fresh bull-whackers. Some of the latter had never seen a bull train, and had lots to learn.

By this time I had begun feeling that I was an old hand. When I was first employed I found it difficult to yoke my oxen, but my small size appealed to the men, and there was always somebody willing to help me. I was now able to yoke my own oxen.

We lay in camp wondering where Kirkendall would send us. In a few days orders came for us to pull out for Fort Collins, Colorado, with government supplies. I bubbled over with joy, for now I was headed for the Plains. Kirkendall received twenty-five cents a pound for the freight he took out. Each wagon was loaded with about seven hundred pounds of freight, consisting of flour, bacon, sugar, coffee, ammunition, etc. This outfit was made up of twenty-five teamsters, one wagon master, one assistant wagon master, one night herder, and one extra man to take the place of any man that might fall sick. Each man was provided with a gun and ammunition.

Before hiring to Kirkendall, we had been paid off, and I had

more money than I had ever dreamed I would possess at one time. According to the custom of the country, and not without some inclination and vanity of my own, I began investing in good clothes, notably a big sombrero, a Colt's revolver, a butcher knife, a belt, and a bull whip. For the latter I paid $7. His whip was the bull-whacker's pride, and around it circles all his ambition and prowess. Dan bought a similar outfit. I doubt if two boys ever felt more important. I am sure that the older men must have smiled at the two youngsters, each buried beneath his big hat and leaning to one side under the weight of his "shooting irons." How impatient we were for the start! The days seemed to stretch into months. At last, however, we were ready, and whooping farewells, we pulled out.

Little did we dream of the hardships ahead of us. In the comfort of our winter camp we had seen ourselves traveling across the Plains in the bright sunshine of spring, the grass green, the birds singing, and the streams flashing along the way. The winter rains and frosts had made the roads miry and seemingly without bottom. We had gone along without serious trouble until we reached Salt Creek valley. Here we had to pass through a long lane where the mud was hub deep. We did not realize how bad it was until we were well into the lane. Often we were compelled to put twenty-four oxen to one wagon to pull through some of the bad places. This valley was three or four miles wide, and it took us all day to get across. A man's patience was thoroughly tried, and that day I heard more different kinds of swearing than

could be put into a dictionary. After getting out we laid over all next day resting and making repairs. One wagon was sent back to Leavenworth City for material to repair things that had been broken. In Salt Creek valley was pointed out to me a small road in which was said to be Buffalo Bill's old home.

The road grew better in the neighborhood of Maysville, Kansas, on the Big Blue, where there were a good many settlers. We were making between eight and ten miles a day. The Big Blue is a swift stream, and at the time was in flood, which caused us much trouble in crossing, as cattle do not take well to water, especially when pulling loaded wagons. We doubled our teams, cracked our whips, and forced the reluctant oxen into the torrent with a man on horseback swimming on each side of them, and in this way they swam and struggled to the further shore. Often the oxen were in danger of drowning, but the whole outfit was crossed without the loss of a single animal.

At this crossing the river made a bend, and the road took the direction of what was called the "dry" route. So we filled our canteens with water and left the river about three o'clock in the afternoon, driving until late that night, and making a dry camp. Next day brought us to the Little Blue, a tributary of the Big Blue. From there our route bore more to the north, going upstream, and in about three days we were in sight of Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and from there by making a long drive, we got to the Platte River in one day.

All the while since leaving Fort Leavenworth I had been tense

with the expectation of seeing a war party of painted Indians, or a herd of buffaloes sweeping over the Plains. Neither had come to pass, and I was keenly disappointed.

When we got to the Platte, we struck a main traveled road leading out from Omaha, Nebraska, St. Joseph, Missouri, and Atchison, Kansas. These three towns were the main shipping points on the Missouri River at that time. Here we could see trains moving along or in camp on the road. Our route led straight up the valley, and in two days we reached a stage station called Plum Creek, where in later years hostile Indians committed many depredations. There seemed to be something in the very air at Plum Creek that was different from what we had left behind. A feeling of danger, invisible but present, all of which was manifested when an escort of United States soldiers moved out ahead of us when the bull train started.

This meant that we were in a dangerous locality. In my boyish enthusiasm I was delighted instead of being fearful, for it looked as if we were going into the enemies' country, and from all indications we were, for we could see where the Indians had raided the settlements the previous year. At different places where there had been a road ranch or a small store, their ruins told the tale of fire and rapine by savage Indians. These buildings were built mostly of sod, as there was no timber in the country. Here and there we passed a grave at the side of the road. The raiding had been done by the Sioux. Practically the only buildings in this part of the country were the way stations and home stations

of the overland stage company which ran from the Missouri River to California.

After leaving Julesburg, Nebraska, the country became much wilder. We saw great herds of antelope and many deer. I was impatient for the sight of buffaloes, and it seemed strange to me that none had appeared. As a matter of fact they had not worked that far north, but were coming later. All along the road after we got on the overland stage route, the stage drivers, who always drove in a gallop as they passed us, would cry out "Indians on ahead! Better look out!" This we found was done jokingly, to alarm such tenderfeet as might be among us, and we soon paid no attention to it, when we encountered no Indians.

Julesburg consisted of a couple of stores and two or three saloons. Here we got a fresh escort of soldiers. Between Plum Creek and Julesburg we passed a big square stone on which was inscribed "Daniel Boone" and other inscriptions, one saying that further information could be found on the other side, meaning the bottom. This stone was so big that twelve men could not move it. We saw where teams had been hitched to it and the stone overturned. We did the same thing, and found the same inscription on the bottom. I doubt if ever a bull train passed that way without turning that big boulder to satisfy its curiosity.

Three days out from Julesburg we left the Platte, and struck a trail called the dry route, at what was known as Freeman's Orchard. There was no sign of an orchard, however. The South Platte had to be forded, and it was a different stream from any

we had crossed. We stood in dread of it, as the current was swift and its shores rocky. It took us a whole day to get over, and some wagons had to be partly unloaded.

There were only three horses in the outfit, used by the wagon master, his assistant, and the night herder. They were a great help to us in crossing these streams, as the cattle would follow the horses when no amount of whipping could make them take the bad place. Traveling north, we came to the "Cash la Poole," a beautiful mountain stream in Colorado, beyond which was Fort Collins, which we reached in August, being on the road two and one-half months.

I now saw mountains for the first time. Fort Collins was situated on the "Cash la Poole" in the foothills. Long before we got there they seemed to hang in the sky like clouds. The population of Fort Collins was mostly post traders and soldiers. We remained there about a week, unloading supplies and resting the stock. While there I visited an Indian camp and saw my first Indians. They were Utes, and greatly interested me. The squaws were drying wild cherries for winter, pounding them in a stone mortar. The day before we left Fort Collins a fight took place in our camp between two bull-whackers, Edward Ray and Jim Lynch, over a game of cards. Ray shot Lynch, and the latter was left in the hospital at Fort Collins.

Our trip back to Fort Leavenworth was over the same route. My journey had fascinated me, but I was disappointed in not having engaged in a fight with Indians, and in not having seen a

single buffalo. Going back we were trailing three or four wagons together, and drove the rest of the oxen, taking turns with the teams.

Between Julesburg and Plum Creek we met a party of women on their way to Salt Lake City, Utah, to join the Mormons. There was not a man among them, and they could not speak a word of English. I was told that they were Danes. All the women wore wooden shoes. They drove ox-wagons and had the appearance of being very poor. The sight of these women so excited our curiosity that the trainmaster called a halt until they passed us. Their camp was not a great distance from ours, and that night some of the boys wanted to go and pay them a visit, but the trainmaster told them that if they did not want to get left they had better not go.

There were small stores or road ranches, as they were called, all along the route, generally every ten miles, and often we bought at our own expense such luxuries as sweet-meats and canned goods which were not to be found in our commissary. Tomatoes sold at fifty cents a can, and everything else was in proportion. When we got back as far as Maysville we could buy fresh vegetables and geese and chickens by paying a big price for them; but in those days no price was too great to be paid by hungry men. Money was plentiful and if we could get what we wanted, we bought it, regardless of what it cost.

As we approached Leavenworth City, we were met by men soliciting trade for the hotels, stores and saloons, who came out

eight or ten miles to meet us. At the fort our wagons were parked, or formed in a square, to be left there for the winter, and the oxen were taken to the country to be fed. By the time we were ready to break camp, hacks and wagons were coming out to take us down town, each business house being represented. We had drawn practically none of our wages during the trip, and when we were paid, many of us felt rich, and had enough to carry us through the winter if we were not extravagant.

November had arrived and the weather was getting cold. There are few sights more chilling and somber than the Plains in winter, stretching brown and dead under a leaden sky, with the wind moaning and roaring from the north. We could have found jobs with other outfits, as trains were being fitted out for western forts, to both Fort Lyon and Fort Riley. Dan and I would have gone as bull-whackers with these, but were advised by older men not to go, as it would be a hard trip in winter storms and blizzards. Dan and I remained together for a week, enjoying the sights. He decided to go back to his old home in Indiana, where he could be with his parents during the winter. Strangely, I never afterwards heard of or saw him.

In returning from Fort Collins, I had become strongly attached to another young fellow named Johnny Baldwin. We were together in the street one day when we met up with the master of a bull-train that was getting ready to start to Fort Larned. He was a gruff old codger, and looked as rusty as a six-shooter that had lain all winter in the snow. He asked us to go with him, and

we would have gone if we had not struck a better job that very day. After we had told him that we would decide by next day, we wandered into the street. There we met a man who caught our fancy beyond all others we had seen. He was a jolly, good natured fellow, who joked with us, and said that he would like to hire us to go with a government mule train that was outfitting. He said that we would get to see "lots of corn-fed country girls" out in the country where the mules were being fed for the winter. He offered us each $45 a month, and we hired to him on the spot.

This proved to be a much easier job than the one we had just left. The outfit consisted of about 150 head of mules that had been driven to a farm on Soldiers' Creek, about 60 miles from Leavenworth, near where Holden, Kas., now stands. Here we remained all winter. About all I had to do was to help the cook and round in the mules at night. We had an abundance of good things to eat, and grew fat and "sassy."

When the men discovered that I was a good shot, I was given a job that was wholly to my liking – hunting game for the mess. There were plenty of quails, rabbits, squirrels and prairie chickens, and I was in my glory. I ranged the country, a youthful Daniel Boone, enjoying every moment of the time. I seemed to have a natural aptitude in the handling of fire-arms. It was my greatest ambition to become a good shot. In later years I was counted an expert marksman in any company, regardless of how proficient my rivals might be. I always attributed my skill with the rifle to my natural love for the sport, to steady nerves,

and to constant, unremitting practice. Where other men found pleasure in cards, horse-racing and other similar amusements, I was happiest when ranging the open country with my gun on my shoulder and a dog at my heels, far out among the wild birds and the wild animals.

In the neighborhood of our camp were a good many settlers, sturdy, strong people, who lived in the style of the frontier, and, I dare say, got much more contentment out of life than many who came after them and lived under more civilized conditions. During the winter, dances and parties were frequent, and we were hospitably invited to attend them. I went with the men, but was entirely too bashful to take part. I sat beside the fiddlers and looked at the pretty girls, rosy and blushing, and would have given a fortune – had I possessed one – for courage enough to walk boldly up to the handsomest, ask her to dance with me, and be able to dance without making blunders as the figures were called. Alas, such courage and assurance was quite beyond my strongest resolves. I remember, particularly, one black-eyed girl who observed my embarrassment, and would always speak to me and invite me to take part. I adored her for this, but would have fled like an antelope had she approached me.

Along about the first of March we got orders to take the mules to Leavenworth. We were elated at the prospect of change. Where were we going? How long would we be gone? What would be our adventures? These were questions that came to us thick and fast. This was one of the splendid things of life in

frontier days – this eagerness to be off and away after a season of hibernation. Many a hunter, many a scout, many a cowboy, returning from a long and arduous expedition, would swear that never again would he endure misery and hardships such as he had encountered. All winter he would stay close to the cook and roast his shins beside the fire, dead sure that he was forever done with the roving life. Then, one day, came the honking of wild geese flying northward; the sun grew warmer; the grass was springing green around the buffalo chips in the prairie, and in the draws the redbud was lifting itself in little pink clouds. Farewell to all firm resolves! A span of oxen could not have held the plainsman in the quarters which he had believed to be the most delightful place in the world, when he arrived there in the fall. Something was calling him – something in the wind, the sky and the dashing rain – and he went, went like a bird from its cage.

The day we broke camp a "norther" began blowing, and I froze two of my fingers rather badly. We traveled 35 or 40 miles the first day, the mules going at a gallop part of the time. We reached Fort Leavenworth next day, and delivered our mules to the corral-master, after which we went to the Government mess house, where our appetites attracted considerable attention and caused no less comment.

The quartermaster paid us our accumulated wages. We were now without a job. A friendship had grown up between myself and a man named Bill Gladden. The two of us went from the Fort to the city, and remained there about three weeks, attracted

by the curious sights to be seen daily in the coming and going of the brawny multitudes of men who gave to that town a historic interest.

The manager of the farm where I had spent the winter was named McCall. His family seemed to feel much affection for me. His son, Charley, and I became fast friends. McCall offered me a job, which Gladden advised me to accept, as he felt that I was rather young to be fighting my way against the odds that often overthrew strong men in the Plains Country. This, however, was not what I wanted to do. I had made up my mind to go west – and to keep on going west until I could say that I had seen it all, and had hunted buffaloes and fought Indians to my complete satisfaction. Little did I dream of how much of this sort of thing was in store for me in later years. The McCalls were so persuasive however, that I could not resist their kind offers, and I remained on the farm about a year. During all this time Mrs. McCall was a mother to me, and the family treated me as if I were a son and a brother. I am sure that the good influences of this home were helpful to me in after life.

I worked for the McCalls until the fall of 1866. In July a number of horses were stolen from the barn, and my employer gave me the place of night watchman, a responsible position for a boy of my age. I had the greatest confidence, however, in my ability to use my rifle in a way that would be disastrous to thieves. I did not lose a single horse.

The McCalls had two girls and one boy, Charley. The latter

was wild and reckless, but good-hearted and eager for any kind of adventure. Once he had run away from home and gone west with a Government mule train. Old man McCall was a great hand to hunt, and often took me with him on his hunting trips. I always thought that he felt a bit provoked at me when his folks teased him about my killing the most game, but he laughed it off, and would brag on me himself.

That fall the McCalls told me that if I wished to remain and go to school during the winter, my board would not cost me a cent. I was glad to take advantage of this offer, so Charley and I walked to town every day to school – the two girls attended a Catholic boarding school. Prior to this, I had attended school only two terms. Plainly, my school days were limited.

I did my best to keep Charley out of trouble, and am sure that I exerted a good influence over him, as he would nearly always listen to me. Despite my utmost endeavors, he engaged in a number of fights at school, which caused his parents more or less trouble. During all our acquaintance Charley and I never spoke a harsh word to each other.

While I was living with the McCalls a shocking tragedy took place at their home – the suicide of United States Senator James Lane of Kansas. He was visiting there at the time he killed himself. Mrs. Lane and Mrs. McCall were sisters. The Senator was in poor health. While riding with his wife and children, he thrust the muzzle of a six-shooter into his mouth, and pulled the trigger. The bullet came out at the top of his head. Strange to say,

he lived three days. I was with the ambulance that was sent out to convey him to Leavenworth, where he could receive medical aid. Senator Lane was a Kansas pioneer, and took an active and leading part in the conduct of its early affairs.

Leavenworth City was a tough place in those days, filled with all kinds of rough characters. I saw three men lying dead in the street one day, as the result of an extraordinary occurrence. Four men were sitting under a tree playing cards, as a severe electric storm formed and swept over the city. One man suggested that the game should be postponed until after the storm had passed, to which another replied, "D – n the lightning." At that moment a bolt struck the tree with a blinding flash, killing all of the men save the one that had asked that there be no card-playing while the storm was raging. The bodies of the dead men were laid on the floor of the fire station. Their deaths caused much comment, as many persons felt that they had provoked the wrath that fell upon them.

Shootings were as common as the arrival of a bull-train, and excited little comment. The man who was quickest on trigger usually came out ahead – the other fellow was buried, and no questions asked.

CHAPTER III

When the spring of 1867 came around, I was offered my old job on the farm, and Mrs. McCall, a kind, good woman, used all her influence to get me to accept it. But my head was filled with dreams of adventure in the Far West. Always, I could see the West holding its hands toward me, and beckoning and smiling.

Meeting a Government train-master named Simpson, who was hiring men to go out with a train that was to be shipped by railroad as far as Fort Harker, I forgot all that Mrs. McCall had said to me about staying on the farm, and hired to Simpson. Returning to the farm, I told my good friends good-bye.

The Kansas Pacific railroad had now been built as far west as Fort Harker. All our wagons and harness were new and these, together with the mules, were loaded into cars and shipped to Fort Harker. We went into camp close to the Fort.

In this outfit were a good many raw men, while the mules were known as "shave-tails," which meant wild, unbroken mules; only a few had been harnessed and driven. By this time I could handle a team with as much ease as a man could. In my lot were two or three gentle mules – I have cause to remember one old fellow in particular, upon whose back I afterwards had one of the most exciting rides of my life.

We put in ten days breaking the "shave-tails." It was a scene of hilarious excitement, and not without danger, as often mules

would be kicking and bucking in harness with might and main, while others would be running away. At such times the drivers had no time to pay attention to other things.

While in this camp, cholera began raging at Fort Harker, which struck terror to many who stood in no fear of other dangers to life. Many of our men deserted, and two died of the dread disease. I witnessed the death of one of our men, Frinkum, and shall never forget his agony. Men who were apparently in the full vigor of health at sunrise lay dead by night. The authorities kept the number of dead secret as much as possible. The burials were usually at night.

This epidemic of death extended from Fort Harker, Kansas, to Fort Union, New Mexico. Its origin was said to have been in the Tenth Cavalry, a negro command, which had shipped from the East to the western frontier. Now, all this excitement did not bother me a bit – I did not think much about it. The doctors made regular calls at our camp every day, and we were placed on a strict diet. We were forbidden to eat any kind of vegetable or fresh meat. The disease ran its course in about three weeks.

Alas, and again alas, up to this time I had never seen a buffalo! I could almost taste buffalo, so keen was I to behold one of these shaggy monsters, pawing the sandy plain, throwing dust high in air, and shaking his ponderous head at his enemies, defying them to battle.

The Government here issued a new lot of arms and ammunition to us. This looked warlike, and was greatly to my

liking. The guns were the Sharpe's carbine, carrying a linen cartridge, with which was used the "army hat" cap. In addition, we were given a six-shooter Remington, cap and ball pistol. These were the very latest arms.

Now came an eventful, a momentous morning, I had just crawled from under my blankets and was feeding my mules. Glancing to the northwest, I saw a lone object on the plains. At the moment the object apparently failed to make an impression upon my mind, and I turned toward my mules. Then I jumped as if I had been stung by a hornet. With eyes distended, I whirled and looked again at the lone object on the Plains. My body was vibrating as if touched by a dynamo.

A buffalo! No mistake about it. There he stood, rather far off and dim. Maybe he had been waiting for me all these years, waiting for me to see him. That was my buffalo. I determined that I should get him, even if I had to twist my fingers in his shaggy mane and drag him alive into camp.

Seizing a blind-bridle, I slipped it onto the gentle old mule to which I referred in an earlier page, made a dash for my rifle and rode away bareback and at top speed after the buffalo.

The buffalo had turned and was moving away from camp when he caught sight of the boy on the mule riding wildly toward him. With a flip of his tail, the buffalo struck his rocking-chair gait and went lumbering away. Up and down hills and across gullies he galloped. I was hot behind him, and at times was just at the point of getting range, only to see the buffalo increase his

speed and spoil my shot.

We had consumed about eight miles in this sort of thing, when we came to a smooth flat. My old mule was panting and pretty well winded by this time, but I was able to make him take another spurt in speed. This brought me within range. The buffalo fell dead at the first shot. The explosion scared the mule into hysteria, but his was no worse than mine. I had not only killed a buffalo, but had killed, unaided, the first buffalo I ever saw.

By this time three or four men from the outfit had arrived. They were jubilant over my success, and were kind enough to exaggerate the distance of the shot. The buffalo was a hard animal to kill instantly, as a vital spot had to be struck. We skinned the carcass, and each man cut off a chunk of meat and took it back to camp. Greatly to our disgust, not a mouthful were we allowed to cook or eat, because of the cholera quarantine.

A few days later orders were given to load the wagons with Government supplies for Fort Hayes, Kansas, 90 odd miles west of Fort Harker. By this time our "shave-tail" mules were under fairly good control, and we got under headway without much trouble.

On this trip, at a distance, we saw a bunch of Indian warriors, but did not come in contact with them. In my lack of experience I was eager for the fray, and was disappointed when I saw the war party disappear over a long ridge, without my having been able to test my marksmanship and my new Sharpe's rifle. Buffaloes were seen in numbers, and I was lucky enough to kill several "on

my own hook." We reached Fort Hayes in about four days, and returned to Fort Harker in about the same time.

Fort Hayes was garrisoned mostly with negro soldiers. No buildings had been erected at that time, and we unloaded our supplies in the open prairie, where guards had been stationed to protect them. The timber for the buildings was being hauled from Fort Harker.

Our next trip was to Fort Wallace, with Government supplies, the distance being considerably greater than from Fort Harker to Fort Hayes. We always had an escort of soldiers, as there was constant danger of meeting an Indian war party.

In August, 1867, we were sent to Fort Lyon, and on this trip we saw thousands of buffaloes. The breeding season was now approaching its close, and at night and early morning could be heard the constant, low thunder of the bulls, their grunting rising into a roar that was one of the most striking of the natural phenomena of the Plains country. The calves, by this time, were alert, active little fellows, closely guarded by their mothers. Later in the season, all the bulls would segregate themselves from the cows, to range apart until the next breeding season. West of Fort Dodge we saw Indians in war paint, and expected to be attacked, but the rascals veered round us and went on their way.

Fort Hayes was on a tributary of the Smoky Hill River; old Fort Zarah, on Walnut Creek; Fort Larned on Pawnee Fork, and Fort Harker on Big Creek. All these forts were being remodeled and improved. In this way we put in all that summer, hauling

supplies to one fort or the other, and when not engaged in this, we hauled rock for the foundations of the buildings.

Along in October, 1867, while several Government trains were at Fort Harker, waiting for orders, we were notified to make ready to accompany a party of peace commissioners that had been authorized to treat with several of the main plains tribes of Indians in the Southwest, at Medicine Lodge, Kas. These negotiations were afterwards known as the Medicine Lodge Treaty. Like most other treaties with these tribes, it was soon broken.

Several trains, with a part of ours, were to accompany this expedition. I was eager to go, but as no orders had been given to my outfit, I was fearful that I might be left behind. Here was the opportunity I had long looked for – to see a big gathering of Indians close at hand, without danger of getting scalped. I had almost given up in despair, when an orderly galloped up from headquarters, saying that two more wagons must be sent forward at once. It was now 6 o'clock in the evening. Simpson, our wagon-master, approached me and said:

"Billy, you and Frickie (Frickie drove the wagon next to mine) get ready at once and go into Fort Harker."

As a rule, nothing ever greatly excited me in my frontier days, but I am bound to admit that I was now going round and round, so overjoyed was I at my good luck. My agitation came near causing me to be left behind.

I ran as quickly as possible to where my mules were eating

their grain, and without halting jerked the harness from the rack to throw it onto the lead mule. With both feet this mule kicked me squarely in the small of the back. I dropped as if I had been struck with an axe, and found myself partly paralyzed, and scarcely able to move. Recovering slightly, I regained my feet, but found that I could not straighten my body. I was game, however. Calling Frickie, I told him what had happened, and asked him to help me harness my mules, and not to say a word to anybody about my being hurt. Were it known that I had been kicked, I might be sent to the hospital. Frickie was a good fellow, and I was soon on my way to the Fort. By next morning I was in fairly good shape.

Night had come by the time we reached Fort Harker. We had to load and then drive about three miles to camp, on the Smoky Hill. The last two wagons were loaded with ammunition for a small Gatling gun, not an undesirable equipment on Indian peace expeditions in those days.

We pulled out bright and early next morning for Plum Creek, where there was a small road-ranch. Next day we reached Fort Zarah on Walnut Creek and on the third day we went on up the Arkansas and crossed it about seven miles below Fort Larned. We reached Medicine Lodge on the fourth day, where the treaty was to be held.

All along the way on this trip we were traveling through countless numbers of buffaloes. I remember seeing a wounded buffalo cow followed by six big lobo wolves. No hoofed animal could withstand these savage beasts – they were a terror to other

wild life on the Plains. Wantonly, several buffaloes had been shot, and left lying to rot on the ground. An orderly came riding down the line with strict orders, that if another man in the outfit fired another shot at a buffalo he would be placed in irons.

Between the Arkansas River and Medicine Lodge we were met by a number of noted Indian chiefs, mounted upon their finest horses and arrayed in their most splendid costumes. They carried themselves with dignity and in every feature was revealed their racial pride and their haughty contempt of the white man. Among them I recall Satanta, Kicking Bird, and Black Kettle.

Satanta, chief of the Kiowas, rode a big black horse, and presented a magnificent appearance. It was because of his complaint that the order had been issued against the killing of buffaloes – a complaint that lay at the very heart of the grievances of the Indian against the white man in frontier days. He declared that the buffaloes were the property of himself and his people, and to destroy the buffalo meant the destruction of the Indian. Leading a nomadic life, which prevented his tilling the soil, even if he had wished to engage in agriculture, which he did not, the Indian saw that he would be deprived of his principal and most necessary food – buffalo meat – if the buffaloes were killed.

At a later day General Phil. Sheridan, to subdue and conquer the Plains tribes for all time, urged and practiced the very thing that Satanta was fearful might happen. In the early 70's, the state legislatures of Kansas and Colorado, listening to the appeal of the Indians, through sympathetic white persons, enacted laws to stop

the slaughtering of the buffaloes, General Sheridan at that time was in command of the Military Department of the Southwest, with headquarters at San Antonio. The Texas legislature, in session at Austin, was at the point of declaring against the merciless slaughter of buffaloes that was then under way in the Staked Plains and Panhandle regions. General Sheridan is said to have told the legislators that the state should give to every buffalo-hunter a bronze medal, on one side of which should be a dead buffalo, and on the other, a discouraged Indian, adding:

"These men have done more in the last year to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indians' commissary; and it is a well-known fact that an army losing its base of supplies is placed at a great disadvantage. Send them powder and lead, if you will; but, for the sake of a lasting peace, let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated. Then your prairies can be covered with speckled cattle, and the festive cowboy, who follows the hunter as a second fore-runner of an advanced civilization."

The Texas legislature accepted General Sheridan's advice. The Texans as a people were readily disposed to agree with that point of view, for in no State did the Plains Indians commit crimes more cruel and horrible than in Texas.

On our way to Medicine Lodge our train of sixty wagons was strung out for a distance of about two miles, accompanied by a strong escort of soldiers.

The members of this Indian Peace Commission were: N. G. Taylor, Commissioner of Indian Affairs; John B. Henderson, United States Senator; General William Tecumseh Sherman; General W. L. Harney; John B. Sanborn; General A. H. Terry; S. F. Tappan, and General C. C. Augur.

Among the notable chiefs were: Satanta, Kicking Bird, Black Kettle, Medicine Arrow, and Lone Wolf. Black Kettle was then at the height of his power, but soon to meet the death he had so often inflicted. He led the Cheyenne raid in the valley of the Solomon River in August, 1868, and had been in the Sand Creek fight in Colorado, November, 1864, where Colonel Chivington, commanding a regiment of Colorado troops massacred a lot of Cheyennes. I camped on that battleground in 1870 while hunting buffaloes. The spot was still strewn with bones of the dead, and the trees were yet scarred by the hail of bullets that had come from the guns of the soldiers, who killed old and young, women and children, without mercy, and atrociously mutilated the bodies of the dead. In 1866, at Fort Harker, Black Kettle had made a speech of great eloquence, asking the Government not to permit the building of railroads through the Indian country, as it would drive away the buffaloes and leave the Indians to starve.

This fear of the change that would follow the building of railroads across the Plains was night and day in the heart of the Indian. No chief made a speech in which he did not refer to it. In June, 1871, Little Raven, Powder face, and Bird Chief, Arapahoes; Little Robe and Stone Calf, Cheyennes, and Buffalo

Good, Wichita, were taken to Washington and Boston, that they might be impressed with the white man's strength, and futility of the Indians' further resistance the Government. Stone Calf, in a speech at Tremont Temple, Boston, handled the railroad question in this manner.

"They (the Government) said they would teach our people to plant and raise corn, and to build our habitations from trees. But before they ever ploughed or planted an acre of corn for us they commenced to build railroads through our country. What use have we for railroads in our country? What have we to transport from our nations? Nothing. We are living wild, really living on the prairies as we have in former times. I do not see that we have been benefitted in the least by all the treaties that we have made with the United States Government."

We went into camp on Medicine Lodge Creek, to wait until the gathering Indians had come in. Near us was a small village of Indians, to whom a runner came on the third day to notify them that some of their livestock had been stolen by the Kaws, a neighboring tribe. We could see the wave of excitement run over the village, and the bucks running to and fro, getting ready for the pursuit. The squaws were no less active. They helped saddle the ponies, etc., and jabbered and screamed to each other in a way that would have made it hard for the marauders had they been captives in the custody of the squaws. As each buck got ready, he rode away without waiting for his companions. They returned later in the day with their ponies, but had been unable

to overtake the thieves.

I shall never forget the morning of October 28, 1867. At a distance of about two miles from our camp was the crest of a low swell in the Plains. The background was blue sky – a blue curtain that touched the brown Plains. For a moment I was dumbfounded at sight of what was rising over that crest and flowing with vivid commotion toward us. It was a glittering, fluttering, gaily colored mass of barbarism, the flower and perfection of the war strength of the Plains Indian tribes. The resplendent warriors, armed with all their equipment and adorned with all the regalia of battle, seemed to be rising out of the earth. Their number was estimated at 15,000, but I cannot vouch for its accuracy.

As they came into plainer view, the Indians spread their ranks wider and wider, to create as profound an impression as possible, and inspire us deeply with their power. Now they could be heard chanting and singing. Having arrived within a quarter of a mile of our camp, the Indians charged like a whirlwind, firing their guns and brandishing them above their heads. The charge was abruptly halted, and the Indians stood at rest, waiting for the negotiations to begin. The tribes represented were the Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche.

While the Indians were advancing, and were about half a mile distant, orders were given in camp that every man should retire at once to his tent, and there hold himself in readiness to resist an attack, which might be made at any moment. My boyish curiosity got the better of me, and I was standing just outside the door

of my tent, gazing with open mouth at the oncoming Indians. General Harney was walking up and down the line between the tents, encouraging the men, telling them not to be afraid, as we had enough men to whip all the Indians in sight. He saw me as he was passing my tent. Tapping me on the shoulder with his riding whip, he said, "Get back into your tent, young man." I lost no time in obeying him.

This fine old warrior made a lasting impression upon me, and I can see him now, as if it were only yesterday, passing back and forth in the camp street, with the fire of valor burning in his eyes. He felt the responsibility of this critical moment, and knew that the slightest break on either side would precipitate war on the spot. He made an imposing appearance that memorable fall morning. He was gray-haired, straight, broad-shouldered, and towered to the commanding height of six feet and six inches. General Harney was an experienced Indian fighter, and exerted a powerful influence among the Plains tribes. They knew him and respected him, believing that he had always told them the truth.

The Indians drew up their horses at a distance of about 200 yards. General Harney had motioned to them to stop, and for their principal chiefs to come into camp. The latter were obedient to his request and after dismounting, sat down with the peace commissioners. At the end of about an hour's conference, the main body of Indians was permitted to enter camp. There were many Indian boys not more than ten years old among the warriors, which probably was an artifice to create among us the

belief that there were more fighting men than were actually in the ranks.

Bringing up the rear were the squaws and children and dogs. The squaws pitched their tepees on the creek in sight of our camp.

The young bucks spurned all friendly overtures, refusing to shake hands, and conducting themselves in a sullen manner. After riding through our camp many times, evidently to examine it carefully and gain an accurate knowledge of our strength, they withdrew and remained at a distance. During this time the troops were intently watching every movement of the Indians, suspecting treachery at every turn.

The commission and the chiefs finally agreed upon the terms of the treaty, the main point of which was that the Indians should keep south of the Arkansas River. I had reason to remember this particular provision in subsequent years, as did many another buffalo-hunter. To venture south of the Arkansas for buffalo was to risk falling into the very jaws of the lion, as the Indians fought jealously for the preservation of the right which they declared had been given to them at Medicine Lodge.

The making of treaties with the Plains tribes was followed by the breaking of these treaties whenever the Indians saw fit to do so. Conditions generally made it difficult for the Indians to do otherwise. They were beset on all sides by a frontier population that was as hostile to the Indians as the Indian was to the whites. Lack of permanency and continuity in the arrangements made by

the Federal government were largely responsible for the unrest and frequent outbreaks. The situation was clearly described by General W. B. Hazen in 1874, when most of the southwestern tribes had gone on the warpath. He said:

"As one example of this very point, I will call attention to successive treaties made with the Kiowas, Satanta at the head, by five separate and successive commissions, each ignorant of what the other had done, and believing that they alone were receiving the fresh faith of these people. Several solemn treaties were made, by which these people were to cease war, and especially raiding into Texas, previous to the Medicine Lodge treaty of 1866, all to be broken within thirty days thereafter. Then comes that of Medicine Lodge, terms of which you know. Then one was made with General Sheridan and myself, at Fort Larned, in the autumn of 1868, to be quickly broken. Then, again, in 1869, with General Sheridan, to be broken not less than twenty times, until he was imprisoned in Texas. Then a new farce with the commissioners, by which he was released, and he is now leading the war party of the tribe. This would have been impossible had there not been men ignorant of the situation, at each successive occasion to deal with these people, nor could it have taken place had the Army, with its persistent organization, control of Indian affairs. Such is the case all through the administration of Indian matters. One civil administration, or one set of civil officers, in good faith undertakes an experimental policy, good enough of itself, but as soon as anything is done on the new

plan, with all its invariable pledges, and its flattering promises are fully conceived and begun, a new administration begins, with equally good intent, an entirely new policy, unintentionally disregarding all the promises and efforts of its predecessors and their agents. The savage cannot comprehend this, and naturally calls it a lie, the white people a nation of liars, and as evidence relates a half dozen cases like that just described. I am giving no fictitious imaginings, but what I know. This thoroughly destroys any faith or interest that otherwise may be nourished in an Indian community; nor can this be changed only by giving them a consecutive policy, which is impractical only through some branch of government that is in itself perpetual."

The "peace policy" of the Government actually encouraged a number of the more daring chiefs to become defiant in their dealings with Washington. When they saw that the Government did not strike back, or strike back quickly, they did not hesitate to go on raids and commit depredations. Shortly after Satanta and Big Tree, Kiowas, had been paroled by the Texas authorities, in 1873, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, then at Fort Sill, demanded the surrender and arrest of certain Comanche warriors who had been raiding in Texas, saying that if this order should not be obeyed within ten days, it would be inforced by military power. A portion of the Comanche warriors immediately left for the Plains, and it being evident that an attempt to compel compliance by military force could only be successful after a long campaign, the order was suspended and no arrests were made.

The effect of this wavering policy was bad. The same hostile warriors of the Comanches and Kiowas considering themselves victorious, became more and more open in their hostile demonstrations, and during the winter and spring frequent consultations were held by them, sometimes including the neighboring Cheyennes, looking to the marauding expeditions upon a larger scale than for the many years before. Some time in May, at the annual "Medicine" dance of the Comanches, near the mouth of the Sweetwater, one of their young men, making his first appearance as a "medicine" man or prophet, professed to have a revelation from the Great Spirit, to the effect that the Caddoes, Wichitas, and other friendly Indians who were following in the way of the whites, would soon go out of existence, and this would be the fate of the Comanches if they followed the same road; that the only way for them to become the great and powerful nation they once were, was to go to war and kill all the white people they could. The Indians said that he predicted the great drouth that occurred that year; and that he told them that the bullets would drop harmlessly from the guns of the white men; that he appealed to them for the truth of his revelation by predicting that the comet, then attracting general attention, would disappear in five days, and made other demonstrations which to them appeared miraculous and obtained for him entire credence for all his words. The hearts of all the young Comanche warriors were at once fired. Another "medicine" dance was soon after appointed, to which all Kiowas

and Cheyennes were invited, when the Comanche "medicine" man again appeared, and at which plans were discussed and determined on for a campaign of murder and rapine. From this period murders and depredations became so frequent as to excite general alarm.

War parties were soon ranging through what is now western Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, western Kansas, and eastern Colorado. The war plans of the Kiowas, Comanches and Cheyennes were consolidated by an exciting occurrence at Wichita Agency, August 22, 1874, which inflamed them to outbreaks on a larger scale.

A number of Kiowas and the Noconee band of Comanches with their squaws and children went to the Agency and began raiding the fields and gardens of the friendly Wichitas. General J. W. Davidson, in command at Fort Sill, was notified, and he sent Lieutenant Woodward with a detail of forty men of the Tenth Cavalry to disarm the hostiles and compel their return to Fort Sill. Big Red Food, the chief, turned over a few guns and pistols, but declared that he would not surrender his bows and arrows. In the latter he was supported by the terms of a recent agreement in which it was held that only guns should be classed as arms. With a whoop Big Red Food and his warriors dashed away. The soldiers fired a volley at the Indians. The latter destroyed much property and committed several murders in the neighborhood of the Agency. The war party quickly grew in numbers, and prospect of peace in the Plains country was vanishing.

Wagon loads of supplies and presents had been brought for the Indians, all of which were now distributed. The supplies were mostly blankets, clothing, hats, sugar, coffee and flour, which were issued to the head men, and these in turn made distribution among the families. The Indians now seemed in much better humor.

The day was warm, though fall was at hand, and the heat brought much discomfort to some of the Indians – those, for instance, who put on every article of clothing that had been given to them. It was a comical sight to see some of the old bucks wearing two or three heavy coats and two high-crowned Army hats, one on top of the other. Others were attired in Army uniforms, but without trousers. The latter was a garment which no wild Indian could be induced to wear.

In a short time there was much trading going on between the soldiers and the Indians, but on the sly, as strict orders had been issued against it, especially the trading of any kind of fire-arms to the Indians. The temptation was too strong, however, and I traded my old cap-and-ball six-shooter to an old Indian for three buffalo robes and other trinkets.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the day the Indians came in we got orders to be ready to pull out in an hour. It was nearly sundown when we broke camp. We traveled until late that night to reach the Arkansas River crossing, where we went over and made camp.

We pulled into Fort Harker about November 1, and drove on

out to where the rest of the train was in camp. While unloading our wagons at the Post, a rumor spread that gave us some uneasiness – a rumor about what might happen to the fellows who traded fire-arms to the Indians at Medicine Lodge. The fine for a man who had sold a six-shooter would be fifty dollars, which was enough money to buy a whole lot of fun in those days.

These arms were the property of the United States Government, and proof that a man had sold a gun meant serious trouble. An order came to the men to turn in all their arms. It looked as if I was in bad shape. In my predicament Frickie again came to my aid, and just in the nick of time, by offering to lend me his six-shooter – a six-shooter which he personally owned. I turned in Frickie's gun, and later received another, which I gave to him.

We had grown rather tired of the job of telling the boys that had stayed behind all about the Medicine Lodge treaty by the time orders came for us to hitch up for a trip to Fort Leavenworth. At Fort Harker was a lot of artillery that had been assembled there in 1866 by General Hancock for an Indian campaign. He found that dragging cannons here and there over the Plains in pursuit of hostile Indians was about as feasible as hitting a hummingbird with a brickbat. The Indians moved like the wind or like shadows, and were too wary to come within range of artillery. So the cannons were parked at Fort Harker as useless. All of them were to be hauled back by wagon to Fort Leavenworth. Our trail led along the railway for miles, and it

seemed ridiculous that the cannons should not be transported by train. The cost of shipment would have been excessive, however, and inasmuch as the government owned the teams and wagons and was paying us by the month there was no good reason why we should not be hauling cannon to Fort Leavenworth.

We made our first camp near Salina, Kas., and narrowly escaped losing our wagons by fire. In the early morning, a spark blew from a camp-fire into the tall, dry grass. Instantly, the fire began running with the speed of a race horse. All hands turned out to save tents, bedding, wagons, etc. By back-firing, and by beating out the flames near our tents, we were able to get the fire under control. At best, however, we would have lost our wagons had it not been for our good luck in having the teams hitched before the fire broke out. This enabled us to shift the position of the wagons as necessity required.

The fires on the Plains in fall and winter, after frost had cured the grass, were often a magnificent spectacle, especially at night when their radiance reddened the sky for many miles. The sky would be luminous, even though the fire was too far beyond the horizon to be seen. Once under strong headway, with the fire spread over a wide area, it was difficult to arrest its progress. To the experienced plainsman, equipped with a flint or matches, there was no imminent danger, as he knew how to set out protective fires, and thus insure his safety.

These big fires were rather terrifying, nevertheless, especially to the "tenderfoot." Carried forward in the teeth of a high,

boisterous wind, the fire was appalling, and there was something sinister and somber in the low roar that sent terror to the heart of wild animals. Vast clouds of smoke were carried into the heavens, until the sun lost its radiance and hung red and dull, like a copper shield, in the opaque depths. The ashes of burned vegetation sifted down hour after hour, as if a volcano were throwing out fine lava dust. At night, when the wind was still, a fire on the Plains was a beautiful sight. In the far distance, the tongues of flame appeared so small that they looked like a red line of countless fingers, pointing with trembling motion toward the sky. The danger of these fires to life in the Plains country has commonly exaggerated. The grass that grew in the Plains did not have the height to produce a sweeping, high-rolling fire, such as was often seen in the regions of the tall bluestem in eastern Kansas.

Upon reaching Fort Leavenworth, the wagons were unloaded, the outfits turned over to the Government, and the "shave-tail drivers" paid off. I had a comfortable stake for a young fellow, and spent the winter in Leavenworth and Kansas City, mingling with the hardy frontiersmen and listening delightedly to their incomparable tales of adventure. I went frequently to the home of my friends, the McCall's, where I always found a hospitable welcome. Several times I went out from both Leavenworth and Kansas City with hunting parties. In those days, railroad companies used to promote "personally conducted" hunting parties to the buffalo range, hunters coming from such distances

as Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis.

CHAPTER IV

In the spring of 1868 I obtained employment with a man named Powell who owned a store at Baxter Springs, Kas. Powell owned a train of six wagons, all drawn by four-mule teams, which he kept on the road hauling lumber and supplies from Leavenworth to Baxter. Much has been written about Dodge City, Caldwell and Abilene as wild and woolly towns in frontier days. None of them was livelier than Baxter Springs, especially after the completion of the railroad to that point. Baxter was the northern terminus of a trail from Texas across Indian Territory, Indian Territory was infested by the most desperate class of men I ever saw, most of whom were citizens of that lawless country. Baxter Springs supplied in abundance all that the most dissipated character could wish for in the way of whisky, women, gambling and fighting. The story of the early days at Baxter would make a fascinating book.

At Baxter I saw the battleground where Quantrell, the guerrilla, captured General Blunt's supply train in 1864. The capture was virtually a horrible massacre by this blood-thirsty "partisan ranger" and his men. I was told that Quantrell got General Blunt's uniform, and afterwards wore it. I could still see the bullet marks on the trees where the fight took place.

I remember with Powell most of that summer, hauling from Kansas City part of the time. I was still bent upon getting further

west. I thirsted for adventure, but as yet had seen only the mere fringe of it. At the end of several months, I went to Leavenworth with a lot of freighters, and there met up with a man named Cox who was hiring men to go with a mule train to Fort Hays. I hired to Cox, as did Sam Harkness, a companion with whom I had worked all summer. To our great satisfaction, we found that the mules, which had been shipped from Missouri and Kentucky, were all broke, and by no means the desperate "shave-tails" that confronted me when I started from Leavenworth for the first time.

These were exciting times. The very air buzzed with news of Indian depredations. The Government was rushing troops and supplies to the front, as if the world were coming to an end. The Indians had broke out again, and were leaving a trail of blood and ashes in the valley of the Solomon, where settlements were in abject terror, not knowing at what moment a swiftly moving war party might descend and murder the inhabitants, burn the buildings and drive off the livestock. Worst of all was the nature of the cruelties inflicted by the Indians upon all who fell into their clutches. The outrages upon women were too horrible to be described. The forays extended into the Saline valley.

The Indians had kept the treaty that had been made at Medicine Lodge the previous year only until the moment the grass was green enough to feed their ponies and bring back the buffaloes. The Indian was able to live and flourish solely upon buffalo meat, and so long as he had buffalo meat he would eat no

other, not even venison, antelope or wild turkey.

Cox loaded his six hundred mules and his drivers aboard train and we started over the Kansas Pacific for Fort Hays. This railroad now extended as far west as Denver. We reached Fort Hays October 15, 1868. The fall was cold and disagreeable with lots of rain. To add to our discomfort, really our misery, we found that all the mules, big fellows from Missouri and Kentucky, were as wild as wolves, not one of them having been broke. Worst of all there was no time to break them. The Government wanted supplies rushed forward with all possible haste to what was known as Camp of Supply, afterwards Camp Supply, a military garrison, at the junction of Beaver and Wolf Creek in what is now Woodward County, Oklahoma.

The "wild west" performances in recent years were tame affairs compared with the handling of those mules. It was with a feeling of desperation that each man crawled out of his warm bed in the half light of early morning, ate his breakfast and then went out into the raw, drizzly cold to harness his mules. Kicking, squealing and bucking, they wore out a man's patience, and he was tempted to use his six-shooter on the devilish animals. To get them harnessed and hitched and the wagons strung out was a Napoleonic job. Once on the road, however, there was little to do beyond holding the mules in line, as the wagons were too heavily loaded for the mules to run away. When everything was moving, there were one hundred wagons and six hundred mules going down the trail. Our discomfort was increased by the fact

that much of the time the ground was covered with snow. Our supplies were to equip Custer's command that later was to fight the battle of the Washita and wipe out Black Kettle and his band, to be followed still later by General Sheridan's going south and whipping the hostiles so badly that they never fully recovered their courage. The Indians were subdued mostly by the fact that the Government made a winter campaign, something that the Indians had never experienced. They were caught between the guns of the soldiers and the necessity of having food, shelter and warmth for their families and feed for their ponies. Defeat was inevitable under such dire circumstances.

The first day out we got to Smoky Hill River and camped for the night. We then pulled to Walnut Creek, and the third day brought us to Pawnee Fork. Between this place and what is now the town of Buckner, Kas., we had a stampede that for real excitement beat anything I had ever seen. The mules ran in every possible direction, overturning wagons, and outfit colliding with outfit until it looked as if there would never be a pound of freight delivered at Supply. Many of the wagons were so badly demolished that they had to be abandoned and left behind. Their loads were piled on other wagons and carried forward.

Our route carried us past Saw Log Creek, Fort Dodge – there was no Dodge City at that time – Mulberry Creek, and thence to Bluff Creek. Here we sighted buffalo, the first we had seen on the trip. As we advanced further from the border of civilization buffalo grew more plentiful, so plentiful that between

Bluff Creek and the Cimarron a big herd of stampeding buffaloes bore squarely down upon our train. Things looked squally, as there was danger, not only of being run over by the buffaloes but of our mules running away, a disaster that would have been costly. A troop of cavalry was deployed to drive back or turn the oncoming herd. Every man in the outfit got out his gun, and we were able to give the buffaloes a reception that brought many of them to the ground, saved the mule train, and filled our pots and skillets with fine meat.

We reached Camp Supply at the end of a twelve days' journey. The supplies were unloaded on the ground and covered with tarpaulins. The site had been chosen by General Sully, upon the recommendation of an old scout, "Uncle John" Smith, who had been on the frontier about thirty years, and is said to have been the first white man that ever visited the country bordering the two Canadians. We did not see a single Indian during the trip to Supply.

Returning to Fort Hays, we made a second trip down without mishap. But trouble was in store for us on our way back. The unloaded wagons were comparatively light, and the mules could easily pull them. We were driving two wagons abreast. Nobody ever knew what scared one of the rear teams, but it certainly got scared, and that particular outfit was soon going in the direction of Missouri and Kentucky at the rate of about thirty miles an hour. The rattling and banging and jolting of the wagon, and the shouting and swearing of the driver caused a tumult that spread

panic among other teams and the stampede quickly reached the lead teams. So here we went, in every possible direction. It was impossible to hold the mules. Wagons were overturned, broken and scattered over the prairie for miles, and some of the mules were so badly crippled that they had to be shot. Some tore themselves loose from their harness and ran so far away that they were never found. The spectacle of those six hundred mules running away with their one hundred wagons was the most remarkable I ever witnessed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.