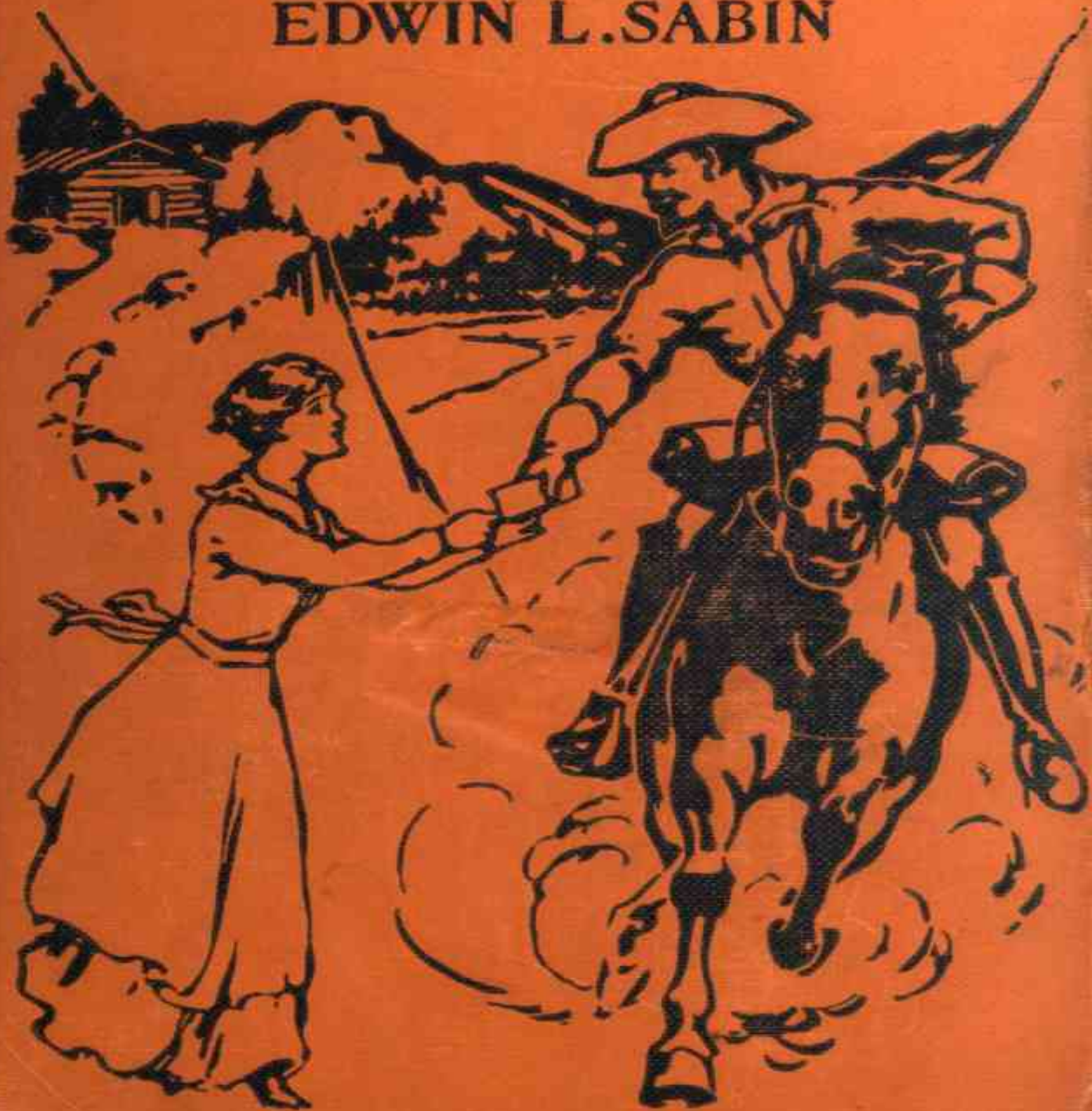
BUFFALO BILL and the OVERLAND TRAIL

EDWIN L. SABIN



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Being the Story of how Boy and Man Worked Hard and Played Hard to Blaze the White Trail, by Wagon Train, Stage Coach, and Pony E

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BUFFALO BILL AND THE OVERLAND TRAIL

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BUFFALO BILL AND THE OVERLAND TRAIL

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

DAVID CROCKETT: SCOUT

ON THE PLAINS WITH CUSTER

GOLD SEEKERS OF ’49

WITH SAM HOUSTON IN TEXAS

WITH GEORGE WASHINGTON INTO THE WILDERNESS

IN THE RANKS OF OLD HICKORY

AS LAME BUFFALO HAD SAID, THE “LITTLE ONE” SHOT THE STRAIGHTEST OF ANY

BUFFALO BILL AND THE OVERLAND TRAIL

BEING THE STORY OF HOW BOY AND MAN WORKED HARD AND PLAYED HARD TO BLAZE THE WHITE TRAIL, BY WAGON TRAIN, STAGE COACH AND PONY EXPRESS, ACROSS THE GREAT PLAINS AND THE MOUNTAINS BEYOND, THAT THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC MIGHT EXPAND AND FLOURISH

BY

EDWIN L. SABIN

AUTHOR OF "WITH CARSON AND FRÉMONT,"
"ON THE PLAINS WITH CUSTER," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

CHARLES H. STEPHENS

AND A PORTRAIT

I hear the tread of pioneers
Of nations yet to be—
The first low wash of waves where soon
Shall roll a human sea.

—WHITTIER.

logo

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

SEVENTEENTH IMPRESSION

PRINTED IN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO THE

OLD-TIME PLAINS FREIGHTERS

WHO UNDER THE ROUGH TITLE, “BULL WHACKERS,” PLODDING AT THREE MILES AN HOUR, BRIDGED WITH THEIR CANVAS-COVERED SUPPLY WAGONS THE THOUSAND HOSTILE MILES WHICH SEPARATED DESTITUTION FROM PLENTY

FOREWORD

History is the record made by men and women; so the story of the western plains is the story of Buffalo Bill and of those other hard workers who with their deeds and even with their lives bought the great country for the use of us to-day.

The half of what Buffalo Bill did, in the days of the Overland Trail, has never been told, and of course cannot be told in one short book. He began very young, before the days of the Overland Stage; and he was needed long after the railroad had followed the stage. The days when the Great Plains were being opened to civilized people required brave men and boys—yes, and brave women and girls, too. There was glory enough for all. Everything related in this book happened to Buffalo Bill, or to those persons who shared in his dangers and his deeds. And while he may not remember the other boy, Dave Scott, whom he inspired to be brave also, he will be glad to know that he helped Davy to be a man.

That is one great reward in life: to inspire and encourage others.

EDWIN L. SABIN

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, June 1, 1914

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WILLIAM FEDERICK CODY

“BUFFALO BILL”

From a photograph taken in 1871, in the possession of Clarence S. Paine, Esq.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

WILLIAM FREDERICK CODY

“BUFFALO BILL”

> Celebrated American plains-day express rider, hunter, guide and army scout, who before he was fourteen years of age had won credit for man’s pluck and shrewdness. In his youth a dutiful and helpful son; in his later years an exhibitor of Wild West scenes, with which he has toured the world. Early known as “Will,” “Little Billy,” “Pony Express Bill,” “Scout Bill Cody”; by the Indians termed “Pa-he-haska” (“Long Hair”); but, the globe around, famed as “Buffalo Bill.”

Born on the family farm near LeClaire, Scott County, Eastern Iowa, February 26, 1845.

Father: Isaac Cody. Mother: Mary Ann Cody.

Childhood spent in Scott County, Iowa: at LeClaire and at Walnut Grove.

When eight years old, in 1853, is removed with the family overland to Kansas.

In the Salt Creek Valley, near the Kickapoo Indian reservation and Fort Leavenworth, Eastern Kansas, Mr. Cody takes up a claim and is Indian trader.

Young William is reared among the Free State troubles of 1853–1861, when the slave men and the anti-slave men strove against one another to obtain possession of Kansas. Mr. Cody, the father, was of the Free State party.

Aged 10, summer of 1855, Billy engages at $25 a month to herd cattle, just outside of Leavenworth, for the freighting firm of Russell & Majors. Gives the money, $50, to his mother.

Is instructed at home by Miss Jennie Lyons, the family teacher; attends district school.

Aged 11, summer of 1856, makes his first trip into the plains, as herder for a Russell, Majors & Waddell bull train.

Continues his cattle herding; and aged 12, in May, 1857, makes another trip across the plains, as herder for the cattle with a Russell, Majors & Waddell outfit bound for Salt Lake, Utah. Has his first Indian fight.

The same summer of 1857, is “extra man” with another Russell, Majors & Waddell wagon train for Utah. Returning, has his second Indian fight.

Arrives home again, summer of 1858. Becomes assistant wagon master with a fourth train, for Fort Laramie.

Fall of 1858, aged 13, joins a company of trappers out of Fort Laramie.

Winter and spring of 1859, attends school again, to please his mother.

To the Pike’s Peak country for gold, 1859.

Returns home to see his mother; and then spends winter of 1859–1860 trapping beaver in central Kansas.

Rides Pony Express, 1860–1861. The youngest rider on the line.

Ranger, dispatch bearer, and scout in the Union service, in Kansas, Missouri and the Southwest, 1861–1863.

Enlisted in Seventh Kansas Volunteer Infantry, 1864, and serves with it until close of the war.

Stage driver between Kearney, Nebraska, and Plum Creek, 35 miles west, 1865–1866.

Marries, March 6, 1866, Miss Louisa Frederici of St. Louis.

Proprietor of Golden Rule House hotel at his old home in Salt Creek Valley, Kansas, 1866.

Government scout at Fort Ellsworth, Fort Fletcher, and Fort Hays, Kansas, 1866–1867.

With William Rose, a construction contractor, promotes the town-site of Rome, near Fort Hays, 1867. Rome is eclipsed by Hayes City, its rival.

Earns title “Buffalo Bill” by supplying the work gang of the Kansas Pacific Railroad with buffalo, 1867–1868. In 18 months kills 4,280 buffalo.

Becomes Government scout with headquarters at Fort Larned, 1868. Performs some remarkable endurance rides between the posts on the Arkansas and those on the Kansas Pacific line. Once covers 355 miles, in 58 hours of riding by day and by night.

Appointed by General Sheridan guide and chief scout for the Fifth Cavalry, 1868.

Serves with the Fifth Cavalry on various expeditions, 1868–1872. Also acts as guide for numerous sportsmen parties.

Temporary justice of the peace at Fort McPherson, Nebraska, 1871.

Guide for the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, on a celebrated hunting tour in the West, 1872.

Guide for the Third Cavalry, at Fort McPherson, 1872. Acts as guide for the Earl of Dunraven, and other distinguished sportsmen.

Elected on the Democratic ticket to the Nebraska Legislature, 1872.

Resigns from the Legislature and in the winter of 1872–1873 stars, with Texas Jack, as an actor in “The Scouts of the Plains,” a melodrama by Ned Buntline.

Organizes the “Buffalo Bill Combination,” with Texas Jack and Wild Bill, and plays melodrama in the Eastern cities, 1873–1874.

During 1874–1876 continues to be scout, guide and actor, according to the season.

Takes the field again in earnest as scout for the Fifth Cavalry, against the Sioux, spring of 1876. Fights his noted duel with Chief Yellow Hand.

In partnership with Major Frank North, of the Pawnee Government Scouts, establishes a cattle ranch near North Platte, Nebraska, 1877.

Seasons of 1876–1877–1878 resumes his theatrical tours in Western melodrama, portraying the late Sioux War and the incidents of the Mountain Meadow Massacre (1857).

Takes up residence at North Platte, Nebraska, spring of 1878. Continues to hunt, ranch, and act; writes his autobiography and his own plays.

In 1883 organizes his justly celebrated “Wild West” combination, with which for three years he tours the United States. In 1886 he takes it to England, and in 1889 to the Continent.

In 1888 appointed brigadier general of the National Guard of Nebraska.

In 1890 he again serves as chief scout, under General Nelson A. Miles, against the Sioux.

Since then, the “Wild West Show,” known also as the “Congress of Rough Riders of the World,” has continued its career as a spectacle and an education. Colonel Cody (still known as “Buffalo Bill”) is ranked as one of America’s leading characters in public life. He has shown what a boy can do to win honor and success, even if he starts in as only a cattle-herder, with little schooling and no money.

BUFFALO BILL AND THE OVERLAND TRAIL

I

TALL BULL SIGNALS: “ENEMIES!”

Since early dawn forty Indians and one little red-headed white boy had been riding amidst the yellow gullies and green table-lands of western Nebraska, about where the North Platte and the South Platte Rivers come together. The most of these Indians were Cheyennes; the others were a few Arapahoes and two or three Sioux. The name of the little red-headed boy was David Scott.

He was guarded by the two squaws who had been brought along to work for the thirty-eight men. They worked for the men, little Dave worked for *them*; and frequently they struck him, and told him that when the Cheyenne village was reached again he would be burnt.

In the bright sunshine, amidst the great expanse of open, uninhabited country, the Indian column, riding with its scouts out, made a gallant sight. The ponies, bay, dun, black, white, spotted, were adorned with paint, gay streamers and jingly pendants. The men were bareheaded and bare bodied; on this warm day of June they had thrown off their robes and blankets. But what they lacked in clothing, they supplied in decoration.

Down the parting of the smoothly-combed black hair was run vermilion; vermilion and ochre and blue and white and black streaked coppery forehead, high cheek-bones and firm chin, and lay lavishly over brawny chest and sinewy arms. At the parting of the braids were stuck feathers—common feathers for the braves, tipped eagle feathers for the chiefs. The long braids themselves were

wrapped in otter-skin and red flannel. From ears hung copper and brass and silver pendants. Upon wrists and upper arms were broad bracelets and armlets of copper. Upon feet were beaded moccasins worked in tribal designs. The fashion of the paint and the style of the moccasins it was which said that these riders were Cheyennes.

The column had no household baggage and no children (except little Dave) and no dogs; and it had no women other than just the two. The men were painted and although they rode bareheaded, from the saddle-horn of many tossed crested, feathered bonnets with long tails. These were war-bonnets. All the bows were short, thick bows. These were war-bows. All the arrows in the full quivers were barbed arrows. Hunting arrows were smooth. The lances were tufted and showy. The shields, slung to left arm, were the thick, boastfully painted war shields. The ponies were picked ponies; war ponies. Yes, anybody with half an eye could have read that this was a war party, not a hunting party or a village on the move.

Davy could have proven it. Wasn't he here, riding between two mean squaws? And look at the plunder, from white people—some of it from his own uncle and aunt, all of it from the "whoa-haw" trains, as the Indians had named the ox-wagon columns of the emigrants and freighters.

Ever since, two weeks back, these Cheyennes had so suddenly out-charged upon his uncle's wagon and another, strayed from the main column, they had been looking for more "whoa-haws." This year, 1858, and the preceding half dozen years had been fine ones for Indians in search of plunder. Thousands of white people were crossing the plains, between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains; their big canvas-covered wagons contained curious and valuable things, as well as women and children. They were drawn by cattle and horses or mules, and behind followed large bands of other cattle and horses and mules. Sometimes these "whoa-haw" people fought stoutly, sometimes they had no chance to fight—as had been the case with little Dave's uncle.

Tall Bull was the young chief in charge of the squad that had attacked the two wagons. Now Tall Bull was one of the scouts riding

on the flanks and ahead of the war party, so as to spy out the country. In his two weeks with the Cheyennes Dave had learned them well. They were no fools. They rode cunningly. They were disciplined. While they kept to the low country their scouts skirted the edges of the higher country, in order to see far. By wave of blanket or movement of horse these keen-eyed scouts could signal back for more than a mile, and every Indian in the column could read the signs. Then the head chief, Cut Nose, would grunt an order, and his young men would obey.

The march was threading the bottom of a bushy ravine. Cut Nose, head chief, led; Bear-Who-Walks and Lame Buffalo, sub-chiefs, rode with him. Behind filed the long column. In the rear of all trailed the two squaws, guarding the miserable Davy.

Suddenly adown the column travelled, in one great writhe, a commotion. A scout, to the right, ahead, was signalling. He was Tall Bull. His figure, of painted self and mottled pony, was plainly outlined just at the juncture of brushy rim and sky. Now he had dismounted, and had crept forward, half stooped, as if the better to see, the less to be seen. But back he scurried, more under cover of the ravine edge; standing he snatched his buffalo robe from about his waist and swung it with the gesture that meant “Somebody in sight!”

He sprang to his spotted pony, and down he came, riding in a slow zigzag and making little circles, too. The slow zigzag meant “No hurry” and the little circles meant “Not many strangers.” And he signed with his hand.

However, large party or small party, the news was very welcome. All the other scouts sped to see what Tall Bull had seen. From side ravines out rushed at gallop the little exploring detachments. ’Twas astonishing how fast the news spread. The two squaws jabbered eagerly; and the aides of Cut Nose went galloping to reconnoitre.

As for Cut Nose himself, he halted, and thereby halted the column, while he composedly sat to receive reports. The rear gradually pressed forward to hear, and the squaws strained their ears. Davy could not understand, but this is what was said, by sign and word, when Tall Bull had arrived:

“What is it?”

“White men, on horses.”

“How many?”

“Three.”

“How far?”

“A short pony ride.”

“What are they doing?”

“Travelling.”

“Any baggage?”

“No.”

“Are they armed?”

“Yes. Guns.”

Cut Nose grunted. Now Lame Buffalo, sub-chief, came scouring back. He had seen the three men. It was as Tall Bull had said. Two of the men were large, one was small. They were riding mules, and were dressed in “whoa-haw” clothes, so they were not trappers or hunters, but probably belonged to that “whoa-haw” train of many men that the column had sighted travelling east. They were riding as if they wished to catch it. But they could be reached easily, said Lame Buffalo, his black eyes blazing. Blazed the black eyes of all; and fiercest were the snappy black eyes of the two squaws. The three “whoa-haws” could be reached easily by following up a side ravine that would lead out almost within bow-shot. Then the white men would be cut off in the midst of a flat open place where they could not hide.

“Good,” grunted Cut Nose; and he issued short, rapid orders. Little Dave had not understood the words but he could understand the gestures and signs that made up more than half the talk; and he could understand the bustle that followed. The Cheyennes, the few Arapahoes and Sioux, were preparing themselves for battle.

Blankets and robes were thrown looser. Leggings were kicked off, to leave the limbs still freer. The rawhide loops by which the riders might hang to the far side of their ponies were hastily tested. Quivers were jerked into more convenient position. Arrows were loosened in them. The unstrung bows were strung. The two warriors who had old guns freshened the priming and readjusted the caps upon the nipples. Several of the younger warriors hurriedly slashed face and chest anew with paint. War bonnets were set upon heads; their feathered tails fell nearly to the ground.

With a single eagle glance adown his force Cut Nose, raising his hand as signal, dashed away up the ravine. After him dashed all his array, even to the two squaws and little Dave.

Braids tossed, hoofs thudded, war bonnets streamed, and every painted rider leaned forward, avid for the exit and the attack. Dave's heart beat high. He was afraid for the white men. The Cheyennes were so many, so eager, and so fierce.

The scouts before kept signing that all was well. The white men evidently were riding unconscious of a foe close at hand. At the side ravine Cut Nose darted in. Its farther end was closed by brush and low plum trees, which rose to fringe the plateau above. A scout was here, peering, watching the field. He was Yellow Hand, son of Cut Nose. He signalled "Come! Quick! Enemy here!"

Thus urged, up the slope galloped Cut Nose, Lame Buffalo, Bear-Who-Walks; galloped all. At the top, emerging, Cut Nose flung high his hand, shaking his war bow. Over the top after him poured the racing mass, savage in paint and cloth and feather and decorated weapon. Swept onward with them rode little Dave, jostled between the two squaws, who whipped his pony as often as they whipped their own.

The halloo of Cut Nose rose vibrant.

"Hi-yi-yi-yi-yi; yip yip yip!" he whooped, exultant and threatening.

"Hi-yi-yi-yi-yi; yip yip yip!" yelped every rider, the squaws chiming in more piercingly than any others.

Out from the plum tree grove and into the plateau they had burst, and went charging furiously.

The sun was shining bright, for the day was glorious June. The plateau lay bare, save for the grass dried by weather and the few clumps of sage and greasewood. And there they were, the three whites, stopped short, staring and for the moment uncertain what to do.

They were alone, between bending blue sky and wide plain; a little trio in the midst of a vast expanse. As the scouts had claimed, no shelter was near. At the other edge of the plateau flowed the North Platte River, but too distant to be reached now.

Louder pealed the whoops of the warriors, louder shrieked the shrill voices of the squaws, as onward charged, headlong, the wild company, to ride over the white dogs and snatch scalp and weapon.

Almost within gunshot swept forward the attack. Already had spoken, recklessly, with “Bang! Bang!” the guns in the hands of the two excited warriors. Were the white men going to run, or stand? They were going to stand, for they had vaulted to ground. One of them was small enough to be a boy. Three puffs of blue smoke jetted from them. The leading Indians ducked low—but the shots had not been for them! Look! Down had dropped the three mules, to lie kicking and struggling.

The white men (yes, one was a boy!) bent over them, stoutly dragging and shoving; and next, in behind the bodies they had crouched. Only the tops of their broad hats and their shoulders could be described, and their gun muzzles projecting before. This, then, was their fort: the three dead mules arranged in triangle! Evidently the two men, and perhaps the boy, had fought Indians before. Davy felt like cheering; but from the forty throats rang a great shout of rage and menace. The squaws had halted, with Dave, to watch; unchecked and unafraid the warriors forged on, straight for the little barricade.

“Kill! Kill!” shrieked the squaws, glaring.

The warriors were shooting in earnest; arrows flew, the two guns again belched. The charge seemed almost upon the fort, when from it puffed the jets of smoke. “Bang! Bang! Bang!” drifted dully the reports; and with scarce an interval followed other jets, rapid and sharp: “Bang! Bang-bang! Bang! Bang!”

From the painted, parted lips of the two squaws issued a wilder, different note, and little Dave again felt like cheering; for from their saddles had lurched three of the Cheyennes, and a pony also had pitched in a heap.

Cut Nose swerved; he and every warrior flung themselves to the pony side opposite the fort, and parting, the column split as if the fort were a wedge. In two wings they went scouring right and left of it. Around and around the mule-body triangle they rode, at top speed, in a great double circle, plying their bows.

Their arrows streamed in a continuous shower, pelting the fort. They struck, quivering, in the mule bodies and in the ground. Now from every savage throat rang another shout—high, derisive. On their ponies the squaws capered, and shook their blanket ends. An arrow was quivering in a new spot—the shoulder of one of the whites. Now Davy felt like sobbing. But it was not in the shoulder of the boy; it was in the shoulder of the man beyond him, and facing the other way. However, that was bad enough.

Still, the man was not disabled; not he. His gun remain levelled, and neither the boy nor the other man paid any attention to him. The three occasionally shot, but lying low against their ponies’ sides the Indians, galloping fast, were hard to hit.

Cut Nose raised his hand again, and from the circle he veered outward. The circle instantly scattered, and after their chief galloped every warrior.

Forward hammered the two squaws, with vengeful look at little Dave which bade him not to lag. The warriors had gathered in a group, out of gunshot from the fort. Cut Nose was furious. Indians hate to lose warriors; and there were three, and a pony, stretched upon the plain.

“Are you all old women?” scolded Chief Cut Nose, while Dave tried to guess at what was being shouted, and his two guardians pressed to the edge of the circle. “You let three whites, one of whom is very little, beat us? The dogs will bark at us when we go back and the squaws will whip us through the village. Everybody at home will laugh. They will say: ‘These are not Cheyennes. They are sick Osages! They are afraid to take a scalp, and when an enemy points a stick at them, they run!’ Bah! Am I a chief, and are you warriors, or are we all ghosts?”

Panting, the warriors listened. They murmured and shrugged, as the words stung.

“Those whites shoot very straight. The little one shoots the straightest of any. They must have many guns. They shoot once and without loading they shoot again,” argued Lame Buffalo.

“You talk foolish,” thundered Cut Nose. “These whites cannot keep shooting. All we need to do is to charge swift and not stop, and when we reach them their guns will be empty. Shall Cheyennes draw back and leave three brothers and a good pony lying on the prairie? These whites will go on and join their whoa-haw train, and tell how they three, from behind dead mules, fought off the whole Cheyenne nation! Or shall we send our squaws against them, to kill them! The little white boy will laugh,” and he pointed at Dave. “He will not want to be a Cheyenne; he will stay white. Cheyennes are cowards.”

Through the jostling company ran a hot murmur; but Lame Buffalo, especially scolded, almost burst.

“No!” he yelled. “Cheyennes are not cowards! I am a Cheyenne. I can kill those three whites myself. I will go alone. I ask no help.”

He whirled his pony; he burst from the dense ring, and tossing high his plumed lance, with a tremendous shout he launched himself straight for the mule fort. He did not ride alone; no, indeed! Answering his shout, and imitating his gesture, every warrior followed, vying to outstrip him. Now woe for the whites. Dave’s heart beat so as well-nigh to choke him. His eyes leaped to the fort.

The two men and the boy in the little triangle had been busy. They had rearranged the carcasses to give more protection; the arrow had been pulled from the shoulder of the wounded man; he was as alert as if he had not been hurt at all; and over the mule bodies jutted the gun muzzles, trained upon the Indian charge.

Could that tiny low triangle formed by three dead mules outlast such a yelling, tearing mob, sweeping down upon it? Could it beat back Lame Buffalo alone—that splendid feather-crowned horseman, riding like a demon, shouting like a wolf? He still led, and with every few jumps of his pony he shook his lance and whooped.

Well might those three whites in the mule triangle be afraid, at last; and who could blame the boy, there, if he, particularly, was afraid? It was a bad place for a boy. Dave watched him anxiously, and wondered.

The boy was facing toward the charge; the two men also were facing outward, to right and left of him, that they might cover the charge as it spread.

Up rose the boy's gun; the two men seemed to be waiting upon him. He was aiming, but he would not shoot yet, would he, with the Indians so far off?

Yet, he shot! His gun muzzle puffed smoke. The squaws started, cried out, waved frantic hands—for three hundred yards from the muzzle had toppled, toppled from his pony, Lame Buffalo, smitten in mid-course! It seemed to Dave that he could hear the two white men cheering; but to the cries of the squaws were added the terrific yells of the warriors, drowning out every other sound.

Nevertheless, that was a long, long shot, for boy or man; and a *good* shot. The charge split again; and not daring even to pick up Lame Buffalo, who was crawling painfully and pressing a hand to his side, it circled around and around the mule fort, as before.

As Lame Buffalo had said, the "little one" shot the straightest of any.

II

THE HERO OF THE MULE FORT

Cut Nose signalled his band to council again. Four warriors had fallen, and two ponies. Now at a safe distance from that venomous, spit-fire little fort, they all dismounted, except for a few scouts, and squatted for a long confab.

“Kill! Kill!” implored the two squaws.

“Shut up!” rebuked Cut Nose; and they only wailed about the dead.

On the outskirts of the council, and annoyed by the wailing of the squaws, Dave could not hear all the discussion. Cut Nose asked the sub-chiefs for their opinion what to do; and one after another spoke.

“There is no use in charging white men behind a fort,” said Bear-Who-Walks. “We lose too many warriors, any one of whom is worth more than all the white men on the plains. It is not a good way to fight. I like to fight, man to man, in the open. If we wait long enough, we can kill those three whites when their hearts are weak with thirst and hunger.”

“They have medicine guns,” declared Yellow Hand. “They have guns that are never empty. No matter how much they shoot, they can always shoot more. The great spirit of the white people is helping them. It is some kind of magic.”

At this, Dave wanted to laugh. The two white men and the white boy were shooting with revolvers that held six loads each, and the Cheyennes could not understand. The only guns that the Indians had were two old muskets which had to be reloaded after every shot.

“We will wait,” said Cut Nose. “We have plenty of time. The whoa-haws in front will travel on, leaving these three whites. We will wait,

and watch, and when they have eaten their fort and their tongues are hanging out for water, we will ride to them and scalp them before they die. That is the easiest way."

Some of the warriors did not favor waiting; the two squaws wept and moaned and claimed that the spirits of the slain braves were unhappy because those three whites still lived. But nobody made a decisive move; they all preferred to squat and talk and rest their ponies and themselves.

Meanwhile, in the mule body triangle the two men and the boy had been busy. They did not waste any time, talking and boasting. It was to be seen that they were digging hard with their knives, and heaping the dirt on top of the mule bodies, and between them. An old warrior noted this.

"See," he bade. "The fort is stronger than ever. But by night the wind will change and we can make the whites eat fire. That is a good plan."

"Yes," they agreed. "Let us wait till dark. White men behind a fort in daytime are very hard to kill. There is no hurry."

The afternoon passed. The Indians chewed dried buffalo meat, and squads of them rode to the river and watered the horses. While lounging about they amused themselves by yelling insults at the mule fort; and now and again little charges were made, by small parties, who swooped as close as they dared, and shot a few arrows.

The two men and the boy rarely replied. They, also, waited. Their barricade was so high, that in the trench behind it they were completely sheltered.

But over them and over the field of battle constantly circled two great black buzzards. Lame Buffalo had ceased to crawl, and lay still. The squaws begged the young warriors to go out and bring him in—him and the other stricken braves. The young men only laughed and shook their heads. One did dash forward; but a bullet from the gun of the boy grazed his scalp-lock, and ducking he scurried back faster than he had gone!

That boy certainly was cool and brave and sharp-sighted. Dave was proud of him; for Dave, also, was white, and a boy.

So the afternoon wore away. Evening neared. The sun, a large red ball, sank into the flat plains. A beautiful golden twilight spread abroad, tinging the sod and the sky. The world seemed all peaceful; but here in the midst of the twilight were waiting and watching the painted Cheyennes, as eager as ever to get at those three persons in the mule fort. This twilight, Dave imagined, must be a very serious moment for the fort. The twilight warned that night was at hand.

Dusk settled, and deepened into darkness. The Sioux made no camp-fires. Davy wrapped himself in an old buffalo-robe, and guarded by the two squaws, one on either side of him, tried not to sleep. As he listened, while he gazed up at the million stars, and the plains breeze fanned across his face, he wondered what the boy in the mule fort was doing. No doubt he was listening, too, and wishing that the stars would come down and help, or else send a message to those freight wagons which were travelling on.

Davy must have dropped off to sleep, in spite of himself; because suddenly he was aroused by the squaws sitting up and jabbering. Had morning come? The plains yonder were light. No; that was fire! The Cheyennes, just as they had planned, had set the grass afire, to windward of the mule fort. While Davy, too, sat up, his heart beating wildly, the fire seemed to be sweeping right toward the fort. Behind the line of flames and smoke he could see the dark figures of the Indians fanning with blankets and robes, to make the line move faster and fiercer.

“Humph! A poor fire,” grunted one of the squaws. “Grass too short.”

“Yes. But it makes a smoke, so the men can charge up close,” answered the other.

That, then, was the scheme, if the fire itself did not amount to much. Some of the dark figures behind the line of fire fanned; others were stealing forward, into the smoke itself. The moment was

exciting. The smoke was drifting across the fort; would the two men and the boy suspect that the Indians were following it in?

The line of fire seemed almost at the low mound which contained the three whites; the smoke drifted thick and fast; the figures of the Indians stole forward. Abruptly, from the dim mound spurted a jet of flame, and sounded a hollow “Bang!” Another jet spurted, with another “Bang!” And—“Bang! Bang! Bangity-bang-bang!” Hurrah! That fort was not being fooled; no, indeed. It was ready for anything. It knew what was behind the smoke, and had only been waiting.

“Kill! Kill!” shrieked the two squaws, enraged again. But the warriors gave up, as soon as they found that their smoke scheme had not worked. They shot their bullets and a few arrows, and lay low. Soon the fire and the smoke had passed beyond the mule fort. Some of the braves returned to the camp; the others continued to sneak about, on guard over the fort. Silence reigned.

“We might as well go to sleep,” said one squaw to the other. “Nothing will happen until morning.”

“Lie down, white red-head,” bade the second squaw, roughly, to Dave. “To-morrow we will have three more whites, and that will mean lots of fun.”

Davy obeyed. It was warmer lying down than sitting up. Thankful that the three whites were still unbeaten, and too smart for the Cheyennes, he fell asleep. When again he wakened, it really was morning. The sky was pink, and stars pale, the brush showed plainly. But he had no time to meditate, or invite another “forty winks.” The squaws had sprung to their feet; the air was full of clangor and shouting and shooting; the Indians were making a charge, the little fort was holding them off.

It was the angriest charge yet, all in the chill, pink dawn flooding high sky and broad plain. However, it didn’t work. The two men and the boy were just as ready as ever, and the charge split. Cut Nose waved his hand and motioned. The circle of galloping horsemen spread wider, and dismounting, the riders, holding to their ponies’

neck-ropes, sat down to wait like a circle of crows watching a corn-field.

The two squaws were disgusted. They grumbled, as they prepared breakfast; and under their scowls Davy felt afraid. He wondered what the Indians would do next.

Plainly enough, they did not intend to make any more charges. The sun rose high and higher. His beams were hot, so that the plain simmered. Without shade in that little open enclosure formed by the mule carcasses, the three whites would soon be very uncomfortable. One was a boy and one was wounded. Circling and waiting, the two black buzzards had been joined by a third. Forming a wide ring of squatting warriors and dozing ponies, the Indians also waited. The air was still; scarcely a sound was to be heard, save as now and then the squaws with Davy murmured one to the other, or a warrior made a short remark.

What was to be the end? The grim siege was worse than the charges. The sun had climbed well toward the noon mark, and Davy felt heart-sick for those three prisoners in the mule fort, when, on a sudden, a new thing happened. First, a warrior, on his right, up-leaped, to stand gazing westward, listening. Another warrior stood—and another, and another. Cut Nose himself was on his feet; ponies were pricking their ears; the two squaws, bounding to their feet, likewise looked and listened.

Davy strained his ears. Hark! Distant shooting? Flat, faint reports of firearms seemed to drift through the stillness. No! Hurrah, hurrah! Those reports were the cracking of teamsters' bull-whips. A wagon train was coming! Another wagon train, from the west! See—above that ridge there, only half a mile away, a wagon already had appeared: first the team of several span of oxen, then the white top of the big vehicle itself, and the driver trudging, and several outriding horsemen flanking on either side.

Team after team, wagon after wagon, mounted the ridge, and flowed over and down. It was a large train, and a grand sight; only, it was not a grand sight for the Indians. But in the mule fort the two

white men and the boy had jumped up and were waving their hats and cheering. Davy wanted to join, and wave and cheer.

To their ponies' backs were vaulting all the Indians. The two squaws, panic-stricken, rushed to the safety of their saddles. They seemed to forget little Dave. Cut Nose had dashed to the front, his men were rallying around him. Evidently they were debating whether to fight or run. Louder sounded the smart cracks of the bull-whips; the wagon train was coming right ahead, lined out for the very spot. The Indians had short shift for planning. The two squaws, having hastily gathered their belongings, galloped for the council. Davy started to follow, but lagged, and paused. His own pony was making off, dragging his neck rope, to catch up with the other ponies. Davy wisely let him go.

Now Cut Nose raised his hand; and turning, quickened his pony to a furious gallop. Shrill pealed his war-whoop; whooping and lashing, after him pelted every warrior, with the two squaws racing behind. Straight for the little fort they charged. The three whites had dropped low, to receive them. And—look, listen—from the wagon train welled answering yell, and on, across the plain, for the fort, spurred a dozen and more riders shaking their guns and shouting.

Davy dived to cover of a greasewood bush, and lay low. But the Cheyennes did not stop to get him. They kept on; at the little fort they split, as before, and shooting and yelping they passed on either side of it. The three whites received them with a volley and sent a volley or two after them as they thudded away. And that was the end of the siege.

Davy did not dare to stand and show himself. To be sure, the Cheyennes, both men and squaws, were racing away, as hard as they could ride; but even yet they might send back after him. So he lay and peeped. However, in the mule fort the two men and the boy had risen upright, again to wave and cheer. Waving and cheering, the mounted men from the wagon train came galloping on, and presently the three in the fort stepped outside. Arrived, the foremost riders from the train hastily flung themselves from their saddles, and there was apparently a great shaking of hands and exchange of

greetings. With volleys renewed, from their whip lashes, the teams also were hastening for the scene. The Cheyennes already were almost out of sight. So Davy stood, and trudged forward.

He had half a mile to walk, through the low brush. The first of the wagons beat him to the fort. When he drew near, the lead wagon had halted, and the others were trundling in one after the other. The men were crowding about their three comrades who had been rescued, and for a few moments nobody seemed to notice ragged little red-headed Dave, toiling on as fast as he could.

It was a large train. There were twenty-five wagons, with their teamsters, and about two hundred extra men, some mounted on mules and horses. However, most of the men were afoot. The wagons were tremendous big things, with flaring canvas tops on, or else with the canvas stripped, leaving only the naked hoops of the frame-work. Each wagon was drawn by twelve panting bullocks, yoked in pairs, or spans.

The majority of the men were dressed alike, in flat, broad-brimmed plains hats, blue or red flannel shirts, and rough trousers belted at the waist and tucked into high, heavy boots. The teamsters were armed in hand with their whips, of short stock and long lash and snapper which cracked like a pistol shot. Those cracks could be heard half a mile. The extra men carried mainly large bore muskets, called (as Davy knew) Mississippi yagers; and all had knives and pistols, thrust into waist-band and belt. Whiskered and unshaven and tanned and dusty, it was a regular rough-and-ready crowd.

However, of course the three defenders of the mule fort took the chief attention. They were the two men (the shoulder of one was rudely bandaged with a blue bandanna handkerchief) and the boy. Even the boy wore freighter plains costume, of broad hat and flannel shirt and trousers tucked into boots; and he held a yager in his hand, and had a butcher knife and two big Colt’s revolvers stuck in his belt. He and the two men looked pretty well tired out, but they stood fast and answered all kinds of questions.

The mule fort showed how hot had been the battle, for the mule bodies fairly bristled with arrows. Arrows were everywhere on the

ground about.

The freighters had crowded close, and everybody was talking and laughing at once. Davy stood unnoted on the outskirts, gazing and listening—until on a sudden he was espied by a tall, lank teamster with long dusty whiskers.

“Hello, thar!” the man called, loudly. “Whar’d you come from, Red? Lookee, boys! Reckon we’ve picked up a trav’ler. Whoopee! Come hyar, son. Give us an account of yoreself.”

One after another, they all looked. Davy flushed and fidgeted and felt much embarrassed. The tall whiskered freighter strode forward and grasped him by the ragged shirt-sleeve.

“What’s yore name?”

“David Scott.”

“Whar’d you come from?”

“The Indians had me. They killed my uncle and aunt and made me go along.”

“Whar was that?”

“Back on the Overland Trail. We were with a wagon train and got separated.”

“How long ago?”

“Two weeks, I think.”

“What Injuns?”

“Those——” and Davy pointed in the direction taken by the Cut Nose band.

“I want to know!” The teamster gaped wide in astonishment, and from the crowd came a chorus of exclamations. “How’d you get away?”

“When you scared them off I hid behind a bush. Two squaws had me, and they didn’t wait.”

“You mean to say you war with those same pesky Injuns who war attackin’ this fort hyar?”

“Yes, sir. But I didn’t do any of the fighting.”

“No, o’ course you didn’t. Wall, I’m jiggered!” And the whiskered freighter seemed overwhelmed with amazement. But he rallied, as a thought struck him. “Come along hyar. I’ll interduce ye to another boy.” And by the sleeve he led Davy forward, through the staring crowd. “Hyar, now; I want to interduce ye to a reg’lar rip-snorter, not much older’n you are. Red, shake hands with little Billy Cody, the hero of the mule fort.”

III

WITH THE WAGON TRAIN

“Little Billy Cody” was the boy who had been with the two men in the mule fort. Surrounded by the staring crowd Davy felt rather timid and did not know exactly what to do. But Billy Cody promptly put out his hand, Davy extended his, and Billy gripped it warmly.

“Hello,” he said, gruffly. “Where do you hail from?”

“I was out there, with the Indians, while you were fighting,” explained Davy.

“Didn’t we give it to ’em!” asserted Billy Cody. “They thought they had us; but they didn’t.”

“I saw you shoot Lame Buffalo,” said Davy, eagerly. “I guess you killed him.”

“He shore did,” declared the wounded man. “When little Billy draws bead on anything, it’s a goner.”

“Well, I had to do it,” said Billy Cody. “Lew told me to.”

“So I did,” uttered the second of the two men. “It was time those Injuns knew what they were up against, when they tackled us and Billy. That one shot licked ’em.”

“Hurrah for little Billy!” cheered the crowd, good-natured; and Billy fidgeted, embarrassed, although anybody could see that he was rather proud.

He was a good-looking boy, although now his face was burned and grimy, and his clothing rough. He stood a little taller than Davy, but he was slender and wiry. He had brown hair and dark brown eyes and regular features; and under his grime and tan his skin was smooth. He was dressed just like the men, and carried himself like a

man; but the muzzle of the long heavy yager extended above his hat-brim. Evidently his two companions thought highly of him, and so did the men of the wagon train.

“Some of you tend to Woods’ shoulder; then if you’ll hustle a little grub we’ll be ready for it,” quoth the man called Lew. “Those mule carcasses served a good purpose but they weren’t very appetizing.”

“First of all, I want a drink,” announced the man called Woods.

Prompt hands passed forward canteens, and Billy and the two men took long, hearty swigs of water.

“Arrow wasn’t pizened, was it?” queried several voices, of Mr. Woods.

“No. Lew looked at it, and said not. So he put a hunk o’ tobacco on it, and we haven’t paid much more attention to it,” answered Mr. Woods. “But it’s powerful sore.”

“Here; I’ll fix it up,” proffered a quiet man, who had not been saying much. Now noticing him, Davy thought that he was the finest figure in the whole party. This man was young (he could not have been more than twenty, but this pioneer life turned youths into men early) and was splendidly built. He stood a straight six feet, with slim waist and broad shoulders and flat back; his hair was long and light yellow, and his wavy moustache also was light yellow. His eyes were wide and steel gray, his nose hawk-like, his chin square and firm. His clothes fitted him well, and were worn with an easy grace. About his strong neck was loosely knotted a red silk handkerchief.

“All right, Bill,” responded Mr. Woods, sitting down. “’Twon’t need much, except a little washing.”

Bill calmly proceeded to inspect the arrow wound in the shoulder. Other men were hastily producing food from the wagons.

“Here, Red,” they bade, to Davy; and sitting in the half circle with Mr. Lew and Billy Cody, Davy gladly ate. It seemed good to be with white people again.

“How long did the Injuns have you?” asked Billy.

“About two weeks.”

“They were Cheyennes, weren’t they. Who was their chief?”

“Cut Nose. He was head chief. But Lame Buffalo and Bear-Who-Walks were chiefs, too.”

“That Cut Nose is a mean Injun,” pronounced Billy, wagging his big hat. “But he didn’t catch *us*—not with Lew Simpson bossing our job. I thought we were wiped out, sure, till Lew told us to kill our mules quick and get behind ’em. That was a great scheme.”

“It shore was,” agreed all the men around, wagging their heads, too, while they listened. “Injuns hate to charge folks they can’t see well.”

“Weren’t you afraid?” asked Davy. He liked this Billy Cody, who acted so like a man and yet was only a boy.

“He afraid? Billy Cody afraid?” laughed the listeners. “You don’t know Billy yet.”

“Whether or not we were afraid, we were mighty glad to have those mules in front of us, weren’t we, Billy?” spoke up Lew Simpson. “They made a heap of difference.”

“That’s right,” answered Billy, frankly. And everybody laughed again.

The meal was quickly finished. It consisted of only cold beans and chunks of dried beef, but it tasted tremendously good to Davy; and he didn’t see that Billy or Mr. Simpson slighted their share, either. Mr. Woods had been eating while his wound was being dressed.

“George, you’d better ride in a wagon for a day or so,” called Mr. Simpson, rising, to Mr. Woods. “Well, Red,” and he addressed Davy, “I reckon you’ll travel along with us. We’re bound back to the States. Got any folks there?”

“No, sir,” said Davy, with a lump in his throat. “But I’d like to go on with you.”

“All right-o. Now, some of you fellows hustle us a mule apiece, while Billy and I plunder those Injuns out there. Then we’ll travel.”

Mr. Simpson spoke like one in authority. Billy Cody promptly sprang up, and he and Mr. Simpson strode out into the plain, where the dead Indians and the ponies were lying. Lame Buffalo was the farthest of all; but he was still, like the rest. Evidently he would ride and fight no more.

The wagon train men bustled about, reforming for the march. Three mules were saddled, as mounts for Davy and the two others. Having passed rapidly over the field, Mr. Simpson and Billy returned, laden with the weapons and ornaments of the warriors and the trappings of the ponies. They made two trips. Davy recognized the shield and head-dress of Lame Buffalo, who would need them not again. Billy proudly carried them and stowed them in a wagon.

“Those are yours, aren’t they?” asked Davy, following him, to watch.

“They’re mine if I want them,” said Billy. “Reckon I’ll take ’em home and give ’em to my sisters.”

“Where do you live?”

“In Salt Creek Valley, Eastern Kansas, near Leavenworth. Where do you?”

“Nowhere, I guess,” replied Davy, trying to smile.

“Pshaw!” sympathized Billy. “That’s sure hard luck. Ride along with me and I’ll tell you about things.”

“Here, boy—crawl into this,” called a teamster nearby; and he tossed at Davy a red flannel shirt. “It’ll match yore ha’r.” And he laughed good-naturedly.

“It’s my color all right,” responded Davy, without being teased, as he picked up the shirt. “Much obliged.” He slipped it over his head. It fitted more like a blouse than a shirt, but he needed something of the kind. After he had turned back the sleeves and tucked in the long tails, he was very comfortable.

“Climb on your mule, Red,” bade Billy Cody. “We’re going to start, and Lew Simpson won’t wait for anybody.”

Mr. Simpson was already on his mule. The other mounted men were in their saddles. Mr. Simpson cast a keen glance adown the line.

“All ready?” he shouted. “Go ahead.”

The long lash of the leading teamster shot out with a resounding crack.

“Gee-up!” he cried. “You Buck! Spot!” And again his whip cracked smartly. His six yoke of oxen leaned to their work; the wagon creaked as it moved. All down the line other whips were cracking, and other teamsters were shouting, and the wagons creaked and groaned. One after another they started, until the whole train was in motion.

Mr. Simpson and two or three companions led, keeping to the advance. The other riders were scattered in bunches back on either side of the train; the teamsters walked beside their wagons; and in the rear of the train ambled a large bunch of loose cattle and mules, driven by a herder.

Billy Cody and Dave rode together, well up toward the front.

“Did you ever freight any?” queried Billy. “What was that train you were with? Just emigrants?”

“Yes,” answered Davy. “We were going to Salt Lake.”

“Mormons?” demanded Billy, quickly.

“No. After we’d got to Salt Lake maybe we’d have gone on to California.”

“Expect I’ll go across to California sometime,” asserted Billy. “How old are you, Red?”

“Eleven.”

“I’m thirteen, but I’ve been drawing pay with a bull train three trips out and back. The first time I was herder from Fort Leavenworth out to Fort Kearney and back. Next time I was herder from Leavenworth for Salt Lake, but the Injuns turned us at Plum Creek just beyond Fort Kearney and we had to quit. I killed an Injun too dead to skin,

but I was so scared I didn't know what I was doing. Last summer I went out as extra hand with a big outfit for the soldiers at Salt Lake, but the Mormons held us up and took all our stuff, so we couldn't help the army, and we had to spend the winter at Fort Bridger, and all of us nearly starved."

"What's an extra hand?" asked Davy.

"He takes the place of any other man, who may be sick or hurt," explained Billy, importantly. "I'm drawing man's pay; forty a month. I'm saving it to give to my mother, as soon as I get back. Weren't you ever with a bull train before?"

Davy shook his head.

"No."

"This is a Russell, Majors & Waddell outfit," proceeded Billy. "They're the big freighters out of Leavenworth across the plains and down to Santa Fe. Gee, they haul a lot of stuff! We're travelling empty, back from Fort Laramie to Leavenworth. This is only half the train; there's another section on ahead of us. Lew and George and I were riding on to catch up with it, when those Injuns corralled us. If Lew hadn't been so smart, they'd have had our hair, too. We wouldn't have stood any show at all. But those mules did the business. And I had a dream that helped. Last night I dreamed my old dog Turk came and woke me; and when I did wake I saw the Injuns sneaking up on us. Then we all woke, and drove 'em back. I'm going to thank Turk for that. I don't know how he found me. This isn't the regular trail; but Lew thought he'd make a short cut."

"Is he the captain?" asked Davy.

"He's wagon boss; he's boss of the whole train, and he's a dandy. I reckon he's the best wagon boss on the plains. George Woods—the man who was wounded—he's assistant boss. He's plucky, I tell you. That arrow didn't phase him at all. Lew bound a big chunk of tobacco on it, and George went on fighting. Do you know what they call this outfit. It's a bull outfit, and those drivers are bull-whackers. Jiminy, but they can throw those whips some!"

"When will we get to Leavenworth, do you think?"

“In about twenty-five days. We’re travelling light, and I guess we can make twenty miles a day. We’ve got a lot of government men with us, from Fort Laramie, and the Injuns will think twice before they interfere, you bet. We’re too many for ’em. I reckon those Cheyennes didn’t expect to see another bull train following that first one.”

“No. They thought you were left behind and were trying to catch up. So they waited to starve you out. That’s what fooled ’em.”

“It sure did,” nodded Billy, gravely. “Say, there’s another fine man with this outfit. He’s the one who dressed Woods’ shoulder. His name’s Jim Hickok, but everybody calls him ‘Wild Bill.’ Isn’t he a good-looker?”

“That’s right,” agreed Davy.

“Well, he isn’t just looks, either,” asserted Billy. “He’s all there. He’s been a mighty good friend of mine. Because I was a boy some of the men thought they could impose on me. A big fellow slapped me off a bull-yoke, when I was sitting and didn’t jump the instant he bade me. I was so mad I threw a pot of hot coffee in his face; and I reckon he’d have killed me if Wild Bill hadn’t knocked him cold. When he came to he wanted to fight; but Wild Bill told him if he or anybody else ever bullied ‘little Billy’ (that’s what they call me) they’d get such a pounding that they wouldn’t be well for a month of Sundays. Nobody wants trouble with Wild Bill. He can handle any man in the outfit; but he doesn’t fight unless he has to. He’s quiet, and means to mind his own business.”

With the wagons creaking and groaning, and the oxen puffing and wheezing, and the teamsters cracking their long whips, the bull train slowly toiled on, across the rolling prairie. The trail taken occasionally approached the banks of the North Platte River, and soon there would be reached the place where the North Platte and the South Platte joined, to make the main Platte, flowing southeastward for the Missouri, 400 miles distant. Beyond the Missouri were the States, lined up against this “Indian country” where all the freighting and emigrating was going on.

The train made a halt at noon, and again at evening. Nothing especial had occurred since the rescue of the three in the mule fort. Davy was very glad, at night, to lie down with Billy Cody under a blanket, among friends, instead of shivering in an Indian camp.

Start was made again at sunrise. To-day the main travelled Platte Trail would be reached, and the going would be easier. Just as the trails joined in mid-morning, a sudden cry sped down the long line of wagons.

“Buffalo! Buffalo!”

All was excitement. Davy peered.

“See ’em?” said Billy, pointing. “That’s a big herd. Thousands of ’em. Hurray for fresh meat.”

Ahead, between the river at one side and some sand bluffs at the other, a black mass, of groups as thick as gooseberry bushes, had appeared. The mass was in slow motion, as the groups grazed hither and thither. On the edges, black dots told of buffaloes feeding out from the main body. There must have been thousands of the buffalo. Davy had seen other herds but none so large as this one. His blood tingled—especially when Lew Simpson, the wagon boss came galloping back.

“Ride on, some of you men,” he shouted. “There’s meat. You whackers follow along by the trail and be on hand when we’re butchering.”

“I can’t go, can I?” appealed Davy, eagerly, to Billy.

“No; you haven’t any gun,” answered Billy. “I’m going, though. I can kill as many buffalo as anybody. You watch us.”

Forward galloped Lew Simpson and Billy and twenty others. From a wagon George Woods, his shoulder bandaged and painful, stuck out his head, and lamented the fact that he was too sore to ride. The buffalo hunt promised to be great sport; and, besides, the fresh meat would be a welcome change.

So away the hunters galloped, Lew Simpson and little Billy leading. The train, guarded by the other men, followed, closely

watching. Even the very rear of it was excited.

Now arose another cry, passing from mouth to mouth.

“Lookee there! More hunters!”

That was so. Beyond the buffalo, up along the river were speeding another squad of horsemen, evidently intent upon the same prey. They were coursing rapidly, but already the buffalo had seen them, and with uplifted heads the farthest animals were gazing, alarmed.

“Our fellows will have to hurry,” remarked the teamster nearest to Davy. “Shucks! That’s no way to hunt buff’ler. Those fellers must be crazy. They’ll stampede the whole herd!”

“They’ll stampede the whole herd, sure,” agreed everybody.

It was a moment of great interest. Davy thumped his mule with his heels, and hastened ahead, the better to witness. The party led by Lew Simpson and Wild Bill and little Billy had been making a circuit, keeping to the cover of the low ground, until they were close enough to charge; but those other hunters were riding boldly, as if to run the buffalo down. And as anybody should know, this really was not the right way to hunt buffalo.

“They’ll drive ’em into our fellows,” claimed several voices. “They’ll do the runnin’ an’ we’ll do the killin’!”

“Or else they’ll drive ’em into *us*!” cried others. “Watch out, boys! Watch yore teams! Steady with yore teams, or there’ll be the dickens to pay.”

That seemed likely. The stranger hunters were right upon the herd; the outside buffalo had wheeled; and tossing their heads and whirling, now with heads low and tails high the whole great herd was being set in motion, fleeing to escape. The thudding of their hoofs drifted like rolling thunder. After the herd pelted the stranger hunters.

Part of the herd plashed through the river; part made for the sand-hills—but smelling or sighting the Simpson party, they veered and came on, between the river and the sand-hills, straight for the trail and the wagon-train. In vain out dashed, to turn them, the Simpson party; from the train itself the horsemen spurred forward, as a

bulwark of defense; the teamsters shouted and “Gee-hawed” and swung their bull-whips, and the oxen, surging and swerving, their nostrils wide and their eyes bulging, dragged the wagons in confusion. In his excitement Davy rode on, into the advance, to help it.

To shout and wave at those crazy hunters and order them to quit their pursuit was useless. They didn’t see and they couldn’t hear; at least, they did not seem to understand. Panic-stricken, the buffaloes came straight on. Off to the side Lew Simpson and Wild Bill and little Billy and companions were shooting rapidly; the stranger hunters were shooting, behind; and now the reinforcements from the train were shooting and yelling, hoping to split the herd. Some of the buffaloes staggered and fell; others never hesitated or turned, but forged along as if blind and deaf. One enormous old bull seemed to bear a charmed life; he galloped right through the skirmish line; and the next thing that Davy, as excited as anybody, knew, the bull sighted him, and charged him.

Davy found himself apparently all alone with the big bull. He did not need to turn his mule; his mule turned of its own accord, and away they raced. Davy was vaguely conscious of shouts and shots and the frenzied leaps of his frightened mule, which was heading back to the wagon train. Davy did not know that he was doing right, to lead the angry bull into the train; he tugged in vain at his mule’s bit, and could not make the slightest impression. Then, down pitched the mule, as if he had thrust his foot into a hole; and the ground flew up and struck Davy on the ear. In a long slide he went scraping on ear and shoulder, before he could stagger to his feet.

The mule was galloping away; but Davy looked for the buffalo. The big bull had stopped short and was staring and rumbling, as if astonished. The change in the shape of the thing that he had been chasing seemed to make him angrier. He stood, puzzled and staring and rumbling, only about twenty yards from Davy. Suddenly the red shirt must have got into his eyes, for his fore-hoofs began to throw the dirt higher, and Davy somehow knew that he was going to charge.

Not much time had passed; no, not a quarter of a minute, since the mule had fallen and had left Davy to the buffalo. The wagon train men were yelling and running, from the one direction; the hunters were yelling and riding, from the other; and whether they were yelling and hurrying on his account, Davy could not look, to see. Down had dropped the bull's huge shaggy head, up had flirted his little knobbed tail; and on he came.

Davy never knew how he managed—he dimly heard another outburst of confused shouts, amidst which Billy Cody's voice rang the clearest, with "Dodge him, Red! This way, this way!" He did not dare to glance aside, and he felt that it was not much use to run; but in a twinkling he peeled off the crimson shirt (which was so large for him) and throwing it, sprang aside.

Into the shirt plunged the big bull, and tossed it and rammed it and trampled it, while Davy watched amazed, ready to run off.

"Bully for you, Red!" sang out a familiar voice; riding hard to Davy's side dashed Billy Cody, on lathered mule; he levelled his yager, it spoke, the big bull started and stiffened, as if stung. Slowly he swayed and yielded, with a series of grunts sinking down, and down; from his knees he rolled to his side; and there he lay, not breathing.

IV

VISITING BILLY CODY

“All right, Red,” panted Billy Cody. “He’s spoiled your shirt, though. Lucky you weren’t inside it. Say, that was a smart trick you did. Get up behind me. The wagon train’s in a heap of trouble. Let’s go over there.”

Davy’s knees were shaking and he could not speak; he was ashamed to seem so frightened, but he clambered aboard the mule, behind the saddle. Away Billy spurred for the wagon train. Other hunters were spurring in the same direction.

The wagon train certainly was having a time of it. Those stranger hunters, from down the river, had driven the buffaloes straight into the teams. The cavvy of loose cattle and mules had scattered; ox-teams had broken their yokes or had stampeded with the wagons. Several wagons were over-turned; and a big buffalo was galloping away with an ox-yoke entangled in his horns. Wild Bill overhauled him in short order and returned with the yoke; but hither and thither across the field were racing and chasing other men, ahorse and afoot, trying to gather the train together again.

By the time that the buffalo charge had passed on through and the animals were making off into the distance, most of the train’s hunters had arrived. The other hunters, from below, also arrived. They proved to be a party of emigrants, for California, who did not understand how to hunt buffalo. In fact, they had not killed a single one. However, Lew Simpson gave them a pretty dressing down for their carelessness.

“You’ve held us up for a day, at least,” he stormed; “and you’ve done us several hundred dollars’ worth of damage besides.”

“Well-nigh killed that boy, too,” spoke somebody. “Did you see him peel that shirt? Haw-haw! Slipped out of it quicker’n a snake goin’ through a holler log!”

“Little Billy came a-runnin’, though,” reminded somebody else.

“Yep; but didn’t save the shirt!”

That was true—everybody agreed that Davy would not have been saved had he not acted promptly. He was given another shirt (a blue one) to take the place of the one sacrificed to the big buffalo.

The California party rode away, taking a little meat that Lew Simpson offered them after they had properly apologized for their clumsiness. The rest of the day was spent in cutting up the buffaloes, and in repairing the wagons and harness. Not until the next noon was the train able to resume its creaking way, down the Platte River trail, for the Missouri River at Fort Leavenworth.

About twenty miles a day were covered now, regularly, and during the days Davy learned considerable about a “bull train” on the plains. He learned that he was lucky to ride instead of walk; nearly everybody with a bull train walked. However, this train was travelling almost empty, back from Fort Laramie, on the North Platte River in western Nebraska (for Nebraska Territory extended to the middle of present Wyoming), to Fort Leavenworth in eastern Kansas Territory. It was accompanied by a lot of government employes, who did not work for the train, and these rode if they could furnish their own mules. Lew Simpson, the wagon boss, and George Woods, the assistant wagon boss, Billy the extra hand, and the herder, rode, because that was the custom; all the other employes walked.

The oxen or “bulls” (as they were called) were guided by voice and whip. The whip, though, rarely touched them hard; just a flick of the lash at one side or the other of the leading span was enough. A sharp “Gee up!” or a “Whoa, haw, Buck!” and a motion of the lash, did the business. Some of the oxen seemed to be very wise.

“Do you know what those whips are, Red?” asked Billy.

“Raw hide.”

“Better than that. I’ll get one and show you when we camp.”

So he did that noon.

“Hickory stock, and lash of buffalo hide, tanned, with a buck-skin cracker,” informed Billy. “Eighteen inch stock, eighteen foot lash, and cost eighteen dollars. You ought to see some of these whackers sling a whip! They can stand at the fore wheel and pick a fly off the lead team! Yes, and they can take a chunk of hide out, too—but they don’t often do that.”

Davy curiously examined the bull whip. The stock was short and smooth, the lash was long and braided thickest in the middle, like the shape of a snake. The cracker was about six inches in length, and already had frayed at the tip; and no wonder, for it had often been made to snap like a pistol shot!

“I can swing the thing a little, but it’s sort of long for me,” announced Billy, proceeding to practise with it, until he had almost taken off his own ear, and made the whole mess uneasy. “I’m not going to quit, though,” he added, “until I can throw a bull whip as good as anybody;” and he took the whip back to its owner.

Billy was quite a privileged character, at camp and on the march. Everybody liked him, and considered him about as good as a man. To be an “extra hand” was no small job. It meant that whenever any of the teamsters was sick or hurt or otherwise laid off, “little Billy” took his place. The “extra hand” rode with the wagon boss (who was Lew Simpson), carried orders for him down the line, and was held ready to fill a vacancy. So this duty required a boy of no ordinary pluck and sense.

Besides, it was generally known that Billy was drawing wages to give to his mother, who was a widow trying to raise a family. Billy was the “man” of the family, and they depended on him. The wagon train liked him all the more for this. Everybody spoke well of “little Billy,” for his good sense and his courage. Davy heard many stories of what he had done. The fight in the mule fort had showed his quality in danger; and he had proved himself in several other “scrimmages” with the Indians.

He and Davy and Lew Simpson and George Woods and Wild Bill and a squad of government men formed a mess, which ate together. The pleasantest part of the day was the noon halt, around the camp-fire; and the evening camp, at sunset. Billy put in part of his rests at practising writing with charcoal on any surface that he could find. Even when Davy had joined the train, the wagon boxes and tongues and wheels bore scrawls such as “Little Billy Cody,” “Billy Cody the Boy Scout,” “William Frederick Cody,” etc. However, as a writer Dave could beat Billy “a mile,” as the teamsters said. Billy was not much of a figurer, either. But he was bound to learn.

“Ma wants me to go to school some more,” he admitted. “So I suppose I’ll have to this winter. I went some last winter, and we had a teacher in the house, too. A little schooling won’t hurt a fellow.”

“No, I suppose it won’t,” answered Davy, gravely. “I’ve had to go to school. But I’d rather do this.”

“So would I,” confessed Billy. “I like it and I need the money—and I need the schooling, too. Reckon I can do both.”

As for Davy himself, the wagon train seemed to consider him, also, somewhat of a personage, because he had shown his “smartness” when the buffalo bull had attacked him. Of course, he had only slid out of his big flannel shirt, and fooled the buffalo with it; but that had been the right thing done in the right place at the right time, and this counted.

Nothing especial happened as the long train toiled on. The trail was fine, worn smooth by many years of travel over it. This was the old Oregon Trail, and California, from the Missouri River, over the plains and the mountains, clear to the Pacific coast of the West. Beaver trappers and Indian traders had opened it, thirty years ago, and it had been used ever since, by trappers and traders, and by soldiers and emigrants, and its name was known the world around.

The wagon train frequently met other outfits, freight and emigrants, bound west; and before the train turned off the main trail for the government road branching southeast for Leavenworth, the Hockaday & Liggett stage-coach from St. Joseph on the Missouri for

Salt Lake City passed them. It wasn't much of a stage, being only a small wagon covered with canvas and drawn by four mules, and running twice a month; but it carried passengers clear through from the Missouri River to Utah. The wagon train gave it a cheer as it trundled by.

"What are you going to do when you reach Leavenworth, Red?" asked Billy one day, when they were riding along. Leavenworth was now only a few days ahead.

"I don't know," answered Davy. "I guess I can find a job somewhere. I'll work for my board."

"Oh, pshaw! I'll get you a job with a bull train," spoke Billy confidently. "I'll ask Mr. Russell or Mr. Majors. They'll take care of any friend of mine, and you've proved you're the right stuff. But first you come home with me. I'll give you a good time. Wild Bill's coming, too, after a while."

"Maybe your folks won't want me."

This made Billy almost mad.

"They will, too. What do you talk that way for? You ought to see my mother. I've got the best mother that ever lived. She'll be glad to see anybody that I bring home, and so will my sisters, and Turk. You come along. The trail goes right past the place, and we'll quit there, and not wait to reach Leavenworth. I'll get paid off first."

There was no resisting Billy, and Davy promised.

Yes, evidently Leavenworth and the end of that long Overland Trail were near. The talk in the train was largely of Fort Leavenworth and Leavenworth City, where the train would be broken and reorganized for another trip, and the men would have a short rest and see the sights, if they chose. New farms were being passed, and the beginnings of new settlements; and the number of emigrant outfits was much increased. The greetings all referred to the farther West—Kansas, Utah, and California were on every tongue. Over the trail hung a constant dust of travel, and the air was vibrant with the spirit of pioneers pushing their way into a new country. These men, women and children, travelling with team and wagon, were brave

people. Nothing, not even the Indians, was keeping them back. They intended to settle somewhere and establish homes again. The sight sometimes made Davy sick at heart, because he, too, had been travelling with one of these household wagons; but the Indians had "wiped it out."

Well, he was in good hands now. Billy Cody would see him through.

"We'll strike the Salt Creek Valley to-morrow morning," announced Billy. "Hurrah! I'll get my pay order to-night, so we can cut away to-morrow without any waiting."

The morning was yet young when Billy pointed ahead.

"When we get over this hill we'll see where I live, Red. It's yonder, on the other side."

The trail was ascending a long hill. From the top Billy waved his hat.

"There's the Salt Creek Valley. I can see the house, too. That's it, down below. Goodby, everybody. Come on, Red." And with a whoop away raced Billy down the hill.

As he rode he whistled shrill.

"Watch for Turk," he cried to Red, galloping behind. And presently he cried again: "There he comes! I knew he would!"

Sure enough, from the house, before and below, near the trail, out had darted a dog, to stand a moment, listening and peering—then, head up and ears pricked, to line himself at full speed for Billy. On he scoured (what a big fellow he was when he drew near), while Billy whistled and shouted and laughed and praised.

When they met, Billy flung himself from his saddle for a moment, and he and the big dog wrestled in sheer delight.

"Isn't he a dandy?" called Billy to Red. "Smartest old fellow in Kansas. He saved my sisters' lives once from a panther. I'd rather have him than a man any time."

They rode on, with Turk gambolling beside them. He was a brindled boar hound, looking like a Great Dane.

Now Turk raced ahead, as if to carry the news; and several people had emerged from the house and were gathered before the door gazing. Billy waved his big hat, and they waved back. They were a woman and four girls.

“That’s ma and my sisters,” said Billy. Down he rushed, at full gallop of his mule; Davy thudded in his wake.

“Hello, mother! Hello, sisses!”

“Oh, it’s Will! Will!”

Dismounting, Billy was passed from one to another and hugged and kissed. He was held the longest and closest in his mother’s arms. Turk barked and barked.

“Here, Red; come on,” ordered Billy, of Dave. “Mother, this is my friend Dave Scott. He’s going to visit us, and then I’ll get him a job on the trail. These girls are my sisters, Dave. Don’t be afraid of them. Take care of him, Turk. He’s all right, old fellow. He’s a partner.” And Turk, sniffing of Davy and wagging his great tail, seemed to understand.

“Any friend of Will’s is more than welcome,” said Billy’s mother, and she actually kissed Dave. The girls shyly shook hands, and he knew that they welcomed him, too.

Then they all went into the house, where Billy must sit down and tell about his experiences. That took some time, for he had been gone a year. But before he started to talk and answer questions, he said: “Here, ma; here’s my pay check. How do you want it cashed—gold or silver?”

“For goodness sake, Will!” gasped Mother Cody, while his sisters peeped. “Is this all yours?”

“No,” said Billy, solemnly shaking his head. “I can’t say it is, mother.”

“Then whose is it?” she asked anxiously.

“Yours,” laughed Billy.

The Cody house was a heavy log cabin of two rooms and a rough roof, in the Salt River Valley across which ran the Salt Lake overland trail. Fort Leavenworth and the Missouri River were only four miles eastward, and two miles below Fort Leavenworth was Leavenworth City. The Cody farm had been located by Billy’s father as soon as Kansas had been opened for settlement, in 1853, but Billy’s father had died two years ago. As Davy soon saw, Billy was the man of the family, and whatever he earned was badly needed.

It was good fun visiting at the Codys. There was Mrs. Cody and the four girls, Julia, Eliza, Helen and May, who seemed to think that Billy knew everything. Julia was older than he, but the others were younger. There was Turk the big dog; and not far from the Cody place lived other settlers who had children. But among all the boys Billy Cody was the only one who had been out across the plains drawing man’s pay with a wagon train.

The Codys lived right at the edge of the Kickapoo Indian reservation. Billy knew the Indians and they liked him; he could shoot with bow and arrow, and could talk Kickapoo, and had learned a lot of clever ways to camp and travel.

Best of all, past the Cody place, across Salt Creek Valley wended the Overland Trail—climbing the hill here, and disappearing into the west. Over it always hung that veil of dust from the teams and wagons that had set out. All kinds of “outfits,” as Billy called them, travelled it: the straining, creaking “bull trains,” carrying freight for the big freighting firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell; the settlers, bound westward, with their canvas-topped wagons bursting with household goods, the women and children often walking alongside; soldiers, for the forts of the Indian country; gold-seekers with pack mules; “tame” Indians, from the reservations or from outside villages; parties returning for the “States,” from California and Utah and the mountains, some of them with droves of horses, some without anything at all.

It was a very important highway, this Salt Lake, California and Oregon “Overland” Trail, which had one beginning at Leavenworth

on the Missouri, only six miles from the Cody place; and the Codys saw all the travel that started on it. So no wonder Billy had made up his mind to be a plainsman and work on the trail; and no wonder that Davy wanted to do likewise. It seemed a useful work, and much needed; but it called for stout mind and brave heart, as well as sturdy body. As for sturdy body the work itself made people strong. The proper mind and heart were the more necessary qualifications.

Billy soon took the two mules into Leavenworth, and returned them to the company. When he came home, he gave his mother a double handful of gold pieces.

“Will, it doesn’t seem possible that you’ve earned all this!”

“Well, I guess if you’d been along, ma, you’d have known that I earned them; wouldn’t she, Dave!” laughed Billy. “I earned enough just while I was in the mule fort to keep us the rest of our lives—only, I haven’t got it yet.”

“You’ll never go out again, will you, Will?” appealed his mother anxiously. “Promise me.”

Billy put his arms about her and hugged her tight. She was a frail little mother, not nearly as strong as Billy, and she never felt well, Billy had explained to Dave. Now he said, holding her:

“I can’t promise, ma. We need the money, and that’s the quickest way to earn it. But I always come back safe, don’t I? Don’t you ever worry about *me*. I can take care of myself. I’m as good as a man, you know.”

Mother Cody only sighed, and kissed him. She said nothing more.

V

DAVY GOES ON HERD

“Red,” said Billy, after three weeks had passed, “what do you want to do? I’m going out again.”

“Where, Billy?” asked Dave.

“Out across the plains. Got another job with a bull train. I can’t stand this loafing. You can stay here, I reckon. My mother’ll be glad to have you. Or I’ll get you a job with the company.”

Of course, Davy had no notion of staying on at the Cody home, where means were scant and where Mrs. Cody, helped by Billy, had all she could do to take care of her own children. No; he wanted to earn his way in the world.

“I think I’d rather go to work,” he answered. “When will you start, Billy?”

“Next week. Come on into town. We’ll see Mr. Russell. He’ll fix you out.”

“Maybe I’m too small.”

“No, you aren’t. Size isn’t what counts, out here. It’s what a fellow does, not how he looks. See?”

This sounded encouraging, for Billy seemed to know. Hadn’t he gone to work himself herding cattle for the Russell, Majors & Waddell Freighting Company, when he was aged only ten? And now at thirteen he was almost the same as a man! Davy determined to show his own pluck, and do his best, and make himself a place as a worker in those busy days when the great West was being settled.

That noon Billy borrowed a couple of ponies from a neighbor, and he and Dave rode in to Leavenworth City.

“That Mr. Russell is the finest man you ever met,” declared Billy. “Mr. Majors is a good one, too, but Mr. Russell is the one who’s taken special care of me. He was a mighty close friend of my father’s; when dad was selling hay to Fort Leavenworth Mr. Russell let me ride about the country with him and I learned a lot about the freighting business. Times looked kind of hard and somebody stole my pony, and he told me to keep a stiff upper lip and come to Leavenworth and he’d give me a job herding at twenty-five a month. That was four years ago. I’ve been working for the company ever since, except when I had to go to school. When I started in, it was just Russell & Majors—William H. Russell and Alexander Majors; last spring Mr. William Waddell joined them, and now the company is Russell, Majors & Waddell. Mr. Majors has been freighting ever since eighteen forty-eight, on the Santa Fe Trail down into New Mexico. Now the company hauls all the government stuff from Fort Leavenworth across the plains to Fort Laramie and over to Salt Lake. That train I went out with last summer carried nearly two hundred thousand pounds of freight. They’re running about three thousand wagons now, and use four thousand men. They’re a big company, but they treat their men right; and whatever Mr. Russell or Mr. Majors offers you, you take. If we don’t find either of them at the fort they’ll be in town, I reckon.”

Fort Leavenworth was located on the high land, overlooking the Missouri River, two miles above Leavenworth City. It was an important, solid fort, with stone buildings grouped about a large parade ground, and the flag floating in the breeze. Soldiers of the infantry, cavalry, and dragoons were moving hither-thither, drilling or attending to other duties, and on the outskirts of the post were parked a great number of freight wagons, attended by their teamsters.

As he and Davy rode through the wagons, on either side of the trail, Billy called out to one of the men.

“Hello, Buck.”

“Hello, Billy.”

“Is Mr. Russell around here?”

“Yes. He’s over at the quartermaster’s office.”

“When do you pull out, Buck?”

“Thursday the tenth, Billy.”

“All right. I’ll be on hand.”

“That’s Buck Bomer,” explained Billy, as he and Davy rode on. “He’s the wagon boss I’m going out with. Now we’ll find Mr. Russell.”

They had no difficulty in passing the guard stationed beside the road where it entered the edge of the post. Billy seemed to be a familiar figure here. He led the way to a large building that looked like a warehouse, where several freight wagons were standing and where soldiers and civilians were trudging about, as if loading freight.

At the end of the platform Billy slipped off his horse, and tied him; Dave did likewise.

“Come on,” bade Billy. “There’s Mr. Russell now. That sandy little man talking with the officer. We’ll hail him when we get the chance.”

They lingered a few minutes, while Billy edged closer, waiting to be recognized. Davy followed him about anxiously. Presently Mr. Russell caught sight of Billy, and smiled and nodded. The officer turned away, and Billy sprang forward to seize the opportunity.

“How are you, Billy,” greeted Mr. Russell. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve brought my friend Dave Scott over, Mr. Russell,” informed Billy. “He’s the boy I spoke about. He’d like a job, if you can give it to him.”

Mr. Russell eyed Dave up and down. A small man was Mr. Russell. He had a freckled complexion, a rather dried-up appearance, and an abrupt manner; and he was as keen as tacks. He did not seem to be a man who could handle rough teamsters; but evidently he could. Davy tried to stand his gaze, and not to be embarrassed.

“What can you do?”

“He’ll tackle anything.”

“He’s the boy who left his shirt to the buffalo, is he?”

“Yes, sir. We all liked him with the wagons.”

“Well, I can’t send him out this time. We don’t need him with a train.” Mr. Russell spoke directly to Davy. “Did you ever herd?”

“Not much, sir. But I think I could.”

“Well, you go on down to Leavenworth and see Mr. Majors. He’s hiring the herding end of the business. If he wants to take you on, all right.” And Mr. Russell turned away. He was a man of short speech.

“Much obliged, Mr. Russell,” answered the two boys.

“Come on, Dave,” bade Billy, making for the two ponies.

They mounted, to go on to Leavenworth City. This was in plain sight from the high land where the fort was located. It was nestled prettily in a wooded basin beside the river two miles southeast. Fort Leavenworth was on the trail between it and Salt Creek Valley, and the trail continued to the Missouri at the town itself.

A lively place Leavenworth proved to be. It contained about five thousand people, living there, and a lot more who were simply pausing until they had outfitted for the trail westward. The streets were crowded with teams and wagons and people; and the river was dotted with rowboats, barges and several steamboats.

Billy Cody hustled right along, without giving Dave much time to look about. Evidently he was bound for the company office. In fact, suddenly he said so.

“There’s the Planters’ Hotel, Red,” he spoke, pointing. “It’s the biggest. The company’s office is right across the street, kittycorner. See it?”

Kittycorner from the Planters’ Hotel (which was a large three-story building, with a wide porch and a verandah, too, running around its face) Dave saw a sign reading, in big letters, “Russell, Majors & Waddell,” on a brick building. The streets hereabouts were more crowded than at any other point, and the two boys had difficulty in

threading their way, dodging people and horses and oxen and wagons.

“Better tie up here,” spoke Billy abruptly, his quick eye sighting a vacant hitching spot at the sidewalk. “This place is getting too populous for me; can’t hardly breathe.”

They wedged in, tied their horses, and Billy led the way to the Russell, Majors & Waddell office—headquarters of the great overland freighting firm.

“That’s Mr. Majors at the desk,” he informed, undertone, to Dave, on the threshold. And—“How do you do, Mr. Waddell?” he said respectfully, as another man was brushing past them.

“How-do-do, Billy,” responded the man. “Back again, are you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, take care of yourself, my boy,” and Mr. Waddell hastened away, as if on matters important.

“He’s the third partner,” whispered Billy. “But you don’t see him very often. Mr. Majors and Mr. Russell seem to run the plains part of the business.”

Mr. Waddell had been a stoutly-built man, with florid complexion and full, heavy face inclining to jaw. Mr. Majors was almost his opposite, being a rather tall man, although strongly built, with a kindly, sober face and a long brown beard. As Billy and Dave approached his desk he glanced up.

“How do you do, Mr. Majors?” said Billy, hat in hand.

“How are you, Billy?”

“This is my friend Dave Scott, Mr. Majors. He’s looking for a job. He’s been staying at my house since we came in last month with Lew Simpson’s train from Laramie. I’m going out again in a day or so, and he wants to get to work. We saw Mr. Russell up at the fort, and he said for us to come down here to see you.”

“When did you see him?” queried Mr. Majors crisply.

“We just come from him. He thought there might be a job of herding open.”

“That boy’s pretty young.”

“He’s not any younger than I was when I started in, Mr. Majors.” Billy spoke like a man, and Mr. Majors appeared to regard him as a man.

“Where are your parents?” asked Mr. Majors of Davy.

Dave gulped.

“I haven’t any. I was with my uncle.”

“Where’s he?”

Davy shook his head and gulped again. Billy helped him out.

“The Injuns struck their wagon on the trail and wiped them out, Mr. Majors. The Cut Nose band had Dave, and he came into our train after that mule fort fight. He made good with us; Lew Simpson and Wild Bill and George Woods and everybody will say that; and he’ll make good anywhere you put him, I believe.”

“Well,” said Mr. Majors, “if he has no folks that’s a different matter. I don’t want to encourage any boy to leave his home when he ought to be going to school, and getting the right bringing up generally. It’s a rough life for a boy or man either out on the plains. Do you swear?” he demanded, suddenly.

Dave stammered.

“I don’t mean to. I don’t think I do.”

“That’s right,” asserted Mr. Majors. “I won’t have anybody around or working for our company who blasphemes or lies. I won’t have it at all. There’s no sense in swearing. All right then. I can put you at herding, if you really want to work. We’ll pay you twenty-five dollars a month, the same as we pay all herders. Got a horse?”

“No, sir,” said Davy.

“That doesn’t matter. We’ll furnish you a mount, of course. You can have the one that other herder’s using. I hope you’ll make a better

herder than most of the others. Herding is a business just like any other business, my boy. Whatever you do, do well. If you make a good herder, we'll give you a chance at something more. Nearly everybody has to start in at herding. Billy here did. Now he's drawing full pay with the wagon trains. He'll tell you what to do. You can sign the pay roll and start in this afternoon. Mr. Meyers," and Mr. Majors addressed his book-keeper, "have this boy sign the pay roll and the pledge. He's going on herd, with the cattle out west of town."

"Yes, Mr. Majors," answered the book-keeper, opening a large book. "Come over here, boy."

Davy thought this rather sudden, but made no comment. He walked boldly over to the book-keeper.

"Sign here," bade Mr. Meyers, indicating with his finger. And Davy wrote, in his best manner: "David Scott."

"Here's something else," bade the book-keeper. "Better read it. We all have to sign it, if we work for the company."

Davy read the slip. It said:

"While I am in the employ of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I agree not to use profane language, not to get drunk, not to gamble, not to treat animals cruelly, and not to do anything else that is incompatible with the conduct of a gentleman. And I agree, if I violate any of the above conditions, to accept my discharge without any pay for my services."

Mr. Majors had strolled over, to inspect, as Davy signed. He nodded.

"I'm glad to see you can write, my boy," he said. "That's more than some of the men can do. Billy here had to make his mark the first time he signed with us."

"He can write now, though," informed Davy, loyally, remembering the scribbling on the wagon. "I've seen him."

"Yes, Billy's found out that he's no worse off for having put in some time at school. He'll be glad enough of all the school that he can get before he's gone much farther. Have you got bedding, my boy?"

“N-no, I haven’t,” faltered Davy. “Maybe I can find some though.”

“We can rake up a quilt or two for you,” offered Mr. Majors. But Billy spoke quickly.

“No; we’ll fix him out with bedding. We’ve some extra quilts at the house, Mr. Majors. I’ll get them on our way out.”

“Can you go out with him, Billy, and tell him what to do? Number two herd is out six miles. You can find it. Stop at the fort and tell Mr. Russell to furnish him a mule.”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right. You take him and post him.” Mr. Majors extended his hand to Davy, who shook with him. “Do your duty, and a little more whenever you have the chance; don’t curse, don’t learn to drink, keep Sunday as much as you can, read the Bible, and look people in the face. Don’t do anything your mother wouldn’t want you to do. I hope to hear a good report of you. We need the right kind of men in the west, and the boy like you will make the man of to-morrow.”

“Yes, sir,” said Davy. “I’ll try.”

He followed Billy out; and they remounted their ponies.

“Good,” remarked Billy, as they rode away up the thronged street. “Mr. Majors is a queer sort, but he’s the right stuff. He’s a crank on swearing and drinking. We all have to sign that pledge, and if he hears a man swearing he goes straight to him and makes him quit. But everybody likes Mr. Majors, and they all try to keep the pledge. Mr. Russell isn’t so strict, though he backs up Mr. Majors. That’s a new wrinkle to the plains—that pledge business.”

Davy nodded.

“There’s no sense in swearing, anyhow,” mused Billy. “Jiminy, but my mother hated to have me start out bull whacking. It’s a tough life, and some of the teamsters, too, are about as tough as you make ’em. Ma saw Mr. Russell and Mr. Majors and they talked with her and said they’d look out for me: and she read the pledge, and so she let me go. Lew Simpson is a hard looker, you know. She didn’t like him until she found out from Mr. Russell that he wasn’t half as bad as he

seemed. I'm mighty glad I'm here to post you on that herding business. It's no easy job herding a thousand cattle. But you'll make good. All you have to do is to tend to your job. Mother'll fix you up with bedding, and if you need any clothes that we haven't got, you can get them on the company account and they'll take it out of your pay. See?"

So, Billy chatting and Davy listening, they trotted along on the road up to the fort.

Mr. Russell was still at the quartermaster's building busy loading a bull train and checking it up. Billy reported to him, and he nodded.

"All right," he said. "On your way out you tell Buck Bomer to give you a mule from his outfit."

They found Buck in the wagon camp outside the fort. He turned over to them a little mouse-colored mule, with a rawhide bridle and an old stock saddle. The bridle had rope lines and the saddle was worn and ragged, and the saddle-blanket was a piece of sacking. Altogether the equipment looked rather sorry, but Davy said not a word. He made up his mind that he would be better than his outfit.

"You don't care," consoled Billy. "It's good enough as a starter. If you need better you'll get it after a while. We'll stop at the house, and get the other stuff. Then we'll go on. I know where the herd is."

VI

DAVY HAS AN ADVENTURE

At least a thousand cattle were spread out, grazing in the grassy bottom. Much of the grass was still green, some patches had been cured by the sun; and the broad expanse, under the blue sky, with the shadows of the cattle now clearly cast by the setting sun, made a pleasant picture. On the edges of the grazing herd were the herders, sitting their horses or mules. The canvas top of the mess wagon shone white beyond the herd. Down the hill into the valley, and up the opposite hill, out of the valley, were toiling slowly two emigrant trains of wagons and people, following the Overland Trail into the farther west.

“We’ll go over to the mess wagon and I’ll introduce you; then I’ll skip back,” said Billy. “Stand in with the cook, do what the boss tells you, mind your own business, and you’ll get along fine. Don’t be fresh, that’s all.”

Davy resolved that he would remember. He wanted to be a success.

On their mounts they galloped across the turfy bottom, and rounding the herd arrived at the mess wagon. Smoke was already rising from the cook’s fire; and the cook himself was moving about, from wagon to fire, and fussing with his row of black kettles, set beside the fire or atop the coals. The fire had been made in a long shallow trench. The pots had covers on them. Their steam smelled good.

The cook merely glanced up as the two boys approached. Halting and dismounting nimbly, Billy hailed him.

“Hello, Sam.”

The cook now paused and gazed. He was a short, pudgy man, with a big bristly moustache and a broken nose. He wore a wide brimmed hat and a floursack apron, and boots. Odd enough he looked, cooking at the fire.

“Hello, Billy. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing much. Sam, this is Dave Scott, a friend of mine. He’s going on herd. Dave, shake hands with Sam Bean, the best cook on the plains.”

Davy advanced and shook hands with Sam.

“Shucks,” mused Sam, surveying Dave. “Another kid, is it? Who sent him out; the old man?”

“Yes; Mr. Majors. Mr. Russell, too.”

“Well,” said Sam, proceeding with his cooking, “I hope he’s a better kid than that other one we’ve had. That lad was no good. All he thought of was eatin’ an’ sleepin’.”

“Davy’ll make good, all right,” assured Billy, loyally. “I’ll back him up on that. He came in with us in Lew Simpson’s train.”

“He’s the kid who left his shirt to the buffalo?” queried Sam.

“You bet,” answered Billy.

“Huh!” grunted Sam, now surveying Davy with new interest and a little respect.

“Where’s the boss?” asked Billy.

“Comin’,” said Sam, with jerk of his head.

A horseman was galloping in from the herd; but part way he whirled, and went back again.

“That’s Hank Bassett, isn’t it?” asked Billy, keen eyed. “He’s a good one, Dave. He’ll treat you right if you don’t get fresh. Well, I reckon I’ll light out. I’ll leave you with Sam. See you later.”

He shook hands with Dave and climbed on his pony.

“Where you bound, Billy?” queried Sam.

“Going out again Thursday with Buck Bomer to Laramie.”

“Good luck.”

“Same to you,” replied Billy, and rode away. Looking back once, he waved his hand; Sam and Dave waved answer.

“Might as well unpack your mule an’ lay out your beddin’,” advised Sam, gruffly, to Dave. “Wouldn’t unsaddle yet, though. Wait till the boss comes in. Tie your mule to a wagon wheel.”

Davy promptly set about it; he unpacked his bedding, and tied his mule.

“If you’re not too busy,” quoth Sam, sarcastically, “you might fetch me in some more buffalo chips, if you can find ’em. There ought to be some, out a ways, if those blamed emigrants ain’t cleaned ’em up. It’s a wonder to me how far they’ll go lookin’ for fuel. Here, take a sack.” And he tossed an old gunny sack at Davy. “Jest pile ’em on it; don’t stop to stuff ’em inside.”

Davy alertly seized the sacking, and started out. He knew what buffalo chips were: the dried droppings of the buffalo that used to roam by thousands through the valley. They had been driven out of it, largely by the traffic, but they had left their wallows and their “chips.”

The chips had been well gleaned for other cooks, and he must wander some distance from the wagon before he found enough to pay for the picking up. However, in due time he returned with all that the sack could hold. The buffalo chips made a fine fire, with little smoke and much heat. And they were easy and cheap. Everybody used them in travelling across the plains.

Sam grunted, whether pleased or not, as Davy dumped the load by the fire.

“Now fetch me some fresh water from the creek, will you?” bade Sam. “There’s a bucket.”

The creek was a side branch of the Salt Creek, and both streams were running low; but Davy managed to dip the bucket almost full of

water. He brought it back. Sam grunted what might have been thanks or not.

“There comes the boss,” he said.

The man on the white horse was galloping in again; presently he dismounted at the fire. He was a tall man, with scraggy beard, gray eyes and a very tanned skin. He wore slouch hat, blue flannel shirt, jeans trousers and boots. He glanced keenly at Dave.

“Here’s another kid for you to break in, Hank,” informed the cook shortly.

“How’d you get here?” demanded Hank of Dave.

“Billy Cody fetched him out,” said the cook, over his shoulder, from the wagon.

“Who sent him?”

“Mr. Russell and Mr. Majors told me to come out and help herd,” answered Davy, speaking for himself.

“Did you ever herd before?”

“No, sir; except with an emigrant train. I herded horses and cattle there some.”

“Have you crossed the plains?”

“Just part way.”

“He’s the kid the Injuns had when they corralled Simpson and Woods and little Billy, out near Cedar Bluffs last summer,” reported Sam the cook. “Billy says he’s all right.”

“Well, he’s a different color, anyhow,” remarked Hank, referring to Davy’s red head. “How old are you?”

“Ten going on ’leven,” replied Davy.

“What’s your name?”

“David Scott. Billy and the others call me ‘Red.’”

“Got any folks?”

“No, sir.”

“Injuns wiped ’em out,” informed Sam the cook. “Remember?”

Hank nodded.

“Yes. All right,” he continued, in tone more kindly, to Dave; “you can help the cook to-night. In the morning you can go on herd, and see if you can hold the job. That red thatch ought to give you plenty of spunk, anyhow!”

“Yes, sir,” said Davy, encouraged.

Two herders came in for supper, leaving one on guard over the herd. They were rough-appearing men, and Davy and his red head had to take considerable banter and joking. He stood that well. He tried not to be “fresh” or impertinent; and when he didn’t know what he ought to say he said nothing and only grinned. After a while the men seemed to accept him as a pretty good kind of a boy. The fact that Billy Cody had vouched for him was a great help.

That night Davy slept on the ground again (as he had slept when with the wagon trains), rolled in his quilts, his saddle for a pillow. Breakfast was called before sunrise; and after breakfast he went out on herd.

“You’ll be eight hours on and four off,” instructed Hank, “except when you ride in for meals. Tend to business and don’t bother the cattle except when they’re straying. They’re here to rest and get their flesh on. When they stray too far turn ’em back, but don’t run ’em. I suppose Billy told you about what to do, didn’t he?”

“Yes, sir; he told me to look out for Indians and emigrants passing through.”

There were two herders for the herd to which Davy was appointed. Davy thought that he was lucky in his partner, whose name was the Reverend Benjamin Baxter. When the other men had called him “Reverend,” Davy thought they were joking; but he found out that Mr. Baxter actually was a minister of the gospel. He was a pleasant-faced, thin young man, with dark eyes and hollow cheeks, and an occasional cough. Evidently he was out on the plains for his health.

His home was Massachusetts; but in his plains garb and his tan he looked as much of a Westerner as any Missourian. Yes, Davy was lucky to be paired off with Mr. Baxter, who had been well educated and whom everybody seemed to like because, while he was a “preacher” he was also much of a man.

“You ride around your half of the herd and I’ll ride around my half, Davy,” said Mr. Baxter. “When we’re about to meet we’ll turn back. Take things easy. You don’t have to ride every minute, you know; just enough to keep the cattle from straying out where they’re liable to get out of sight or be picked up by somebody passing. I’ll let you know when it’s time to go in for dinner.”

The herding did not strike Davy as hard work, except that it was rather monotonous and steady. It was more interesting at first than later. The cattle, spread out loosely over a wide area, required considerable of a ride along their edges. They were all work cattle—steers or oxen, young and old, used for hauling the wagons of the Russell, Majors & Waddell “bull trains.” Some were decrepit, worn out in the hard service across the plains; others were yet strong, and needed only rest and feed. In the beginning Davy bestirred himself more than was required; he was so afraid lest any of them might stray too far. Soon he was sharp enough to note that as long as they were only grazing, and he could keep his eyes on them, the stragglers might be permitted to have a little freedom to pick the best grass. In fact, the whole herd constantly shifted ground, gradually moving on from clump to clump and patch to patch.

About the middle of the morning Mr. Baxter’s first shift of eight hours was up, and another herder relieved him.

“Now I’ll take a sleep,” he called back, gaily, to Dave as he galloped for the wagon. “Have to sleep when we can, you know.”

Davy continued his herding with the new partner—who was gruff and silent, very different from Mr. Baxter. However, that made little difference, for herding did not give much chance to gossip.

At noon Davy was sent in for his turn at dinner; and when his four hours recess arrived he was glad to dismount at the wagon and lie in

the shade. After he had served half the night on night guard and had not made any mistakes, when he crawled in, in the chill and dark, under his quilts, and settled for his short sleep, he felt like a veteran.

So the days and nights passed, of long hours in the saddle and short hours afoot. The bull herd moved from pasturage to pasturage, with Sam and his mess wagon keeping handy. The days were sunny fall, the nights were crisp, the air pure except for the dust stirred up by the hoofs of the herd or sometimes drifting from the great trail, the cattle gave little trouble, the mess food was plenty although about the same every meal, and herding on the plains proved not such a disagreeable business as might have been expected.

The chief annoyance was the rattlesnakes—although Sam and Hank and several others claimed that the emigrants and the cattle had cleaned about all the snakes out. However, on his first day Davy rode over two, and scarcely a day passed that he did not see three or four. He was told that he must not let one bite his mule, for mules often died from snake bite. Horses and cattle seemed stronger; anyway, the cattle of the bull herd seemed to be what Mr. Baxter called “snake educated”; Davy could tell from their movements that a rattlesnake was near them.

The most interesting part of herding was the sight of the travel on the great Overland Trail. The Trail entered the Salt Creek Valley by a hill on the east and left it by a hill on the west; and at any hour of the day the white-topped wagons of emigrant train and freight train could be seen descending and crossing and ascending, some bound to Leavenworth, but the majority bound westward for the plains trip.

Where they all were going Davy used to wonder. It seemed as though everybody from the East was moving into the far West. Of course, some of the emigrants were bound for western Kansas, where in Arapahoe County, at the base of the Rocky Mountains, people were seeking for gold. Some were hoping to take up farms in Kansas. Others were aiming for the Salt Lake region, where the Mormons under Brigham Young had settled. And others were bound clear across the continent to California for gold and for land. And many did not know exactly where they were going, except that they

were moving west, ever west, to found new homes. The freight trains of the great Russell, Majors & Waddell Company were carrying government stores to Fort Kearney, in Nebraska, and Fort Laramie, also of Nebraska, on the North Platte, and Fort Bridger, in Utah, and Salt Lake, where troops had been sent last winter. The dusty trail, bordered by camps old and new, and by abandoned pots and pans and boxes and clothing and deserted skeletons of cattle and horses, was never vacant, night or day. Whenever the herding business led Davy near to it he viewed it with wonder.

Herding took all of Davy's time. Occasionally Hank Bassett went into Leavenworth, and occasionally the other men rode in—all but Mr. Baxter. He and Davy stayed out. The weather continued clear and pleasant, with the days soft and sunny, and the nights crisp and still. Nobody paid much attention to Davy now, for he was proving a good herder, and was accepted as a member of the herding mess. He was as hard as nails, everything he ate tasted good, long hours on mule back did not stiffen him, and he thought that he knew every steer in the big herd.

One big steer he especially watched. It was a large red and white steer, with a sore hoof which did not heal. Every now and again a portion of the herd was separated and driven in to Fort Leavenworth for another trip across the plains; and new bunches took their places, to rest up again. But the old red and white steer stayed. He was foot sore, but he also was a wanderer, for he loved to stray. Several times during each day he would edge out farther and farther, leading some of his cronies; and in due time Davy must ride in front of him and turn him back. He was a pesky animal, and caused much trouble; the third herder wanted him killed, but Davy and Mr. Baxter only laughed and kept persuading Hank to save him. After all, he was only a steer, with a mind of his own. Maybe he would get well. Davy rather hoped that he wouldn't; he seemed to have such a good time, and the worked cattle were so gaunt and scarred when they returned from their long, hard trips.

Now it was November of 1858. The days were shorter, the nights were colder, the grass was failing, and Indian summer was about to end. Soon the herds would be taken off the plains, for the snow was

due and there would not be enough feed. One day Mr. Baxter was ill in camp; the other herder was off, and Davy found himself left on herd alone for a brief time. This he did not mind. He felt capable of handling the herd himself. So he slowly rode around and around, occasionally halting for a survey of the landscape.

This week the herd had drifted farther than usual from the trail and from the settlements, to the very edge of the Salt Creek Valley, where in numerous pockets amidst low hill the grass was still abundant. Davy never understood exactly how it happened, but all of a sudden he missed the red and white lame ox. His eyes ran rapidly over the herd, seeking the old fellow. The red and white ox was a “marker”; when he was present then the chances were that the herd was holding together, but when he was absent then something must be done at once.

Well, he was absent; he was not even in sight. This meant that probably he had led off a dozen or so followers. From his mule Davy cast keen gaze over the herd and over the surrounding rolling country.

“Gwan!” he ordered to his mouse-colored mule, and striking into a gallop he set off on a wide circle.

From the top of the nearest rise he saw nothing moving. But the top of the second gave him a wide view—and he saw something of much interest. There, about half a mile from him, and out in the open, was a line of moving dots. He made out the red and white steer—he recognized the color and the limp. At least a dozen other cattle were with him. They were strung out in a little group; and behind, several horsemen were driving them. Yes, actually driving them! Indians! Indians were driving off a bunch of strays!

Davy’s heart skipped a beat and suddenly thumped violently. But he didn’t sit looking long. Not he. He knew what Billy Cody would do, and he knew what any herder with spunk would do. He clapped his heels against his mule and away he went straight for the Indians.

They might be Kickapoos. Kickapoos from the reservation frequently visited the cattle camps to beg for food and clothes; and

many of them would carry off more than was given to them. A sick steer was their especial delight. They picked up strays, too, when they could. So likely enough these Indians were Kickapoos. Davy was not afraid of Kickapoos, although, of course, any Indian might be surly when he had the advantage.

On galloped Davy, urging his mule. The Indians had seen him, for they tried to quicken their pace; but the lame steer held them back. Good for the lame steer, who could not travel fast! So Davy rapidly drew nearer.

As he approached he made up his mind that these were not Kickapoos. They wore blankets like any Indians, but their hair was not worn like that of Kickapoos, whose hair was combed back smoothly. And they were not Osages—another reservation tribe of Kansas. The hair of the Osages was roached like a rooster's comb. No; by their braids and by the way they rode these were Cheyennes or Sioux! Whew! That was bad.

They did not even glance around as Davy rode upon them. Still at a gallop he rode around them, and whirling short, bravely throwing up his hand, halted squarely in the path. The baker's dozen of steers (there were thirteen of them) bunched and stopped, panting. The Indians stared fixedly at Davy; two of them rode forward.

Yes, they were Cheyennes, except one Sioux; and the leader was Tall Bull!

"What are you doing with those cattle?" demanded Davy.

"Go. Our cattle," grunted Tall Bull.

"They aren't, either," retorted Davy. "They're my cattle from that herd yonder."

"No," denied Tall Bull, angrily; his companion's eyes were blazing. Davy felt them, and the hot eyes of the four other Indians, in the rear. "You go. Our cattle."

"Where'd you get them, then?" demanded Davy.

"Buy 'em. Take 'em an' eat 'em. Puckachee! (Get out!)"

“Puckachee yourself,” answered Davy, now angry. “You can’t have ’em. I take ’em back. Savvy? They belong to Russell, Majors & Waddell. See that brand?”

The two Indians grunted one to another. The Indians behind called in their own language.

“Get out of the way,” ordered Davy, boldly. “Gee, Buck! Whitey! Gee-haw!”

The cattle began to turn; but Tall Bull interposed by reining his pony and forcing them around again.

“No whoa-haws; ours. Buy ’em. How much?”

“Can’t sell ’em. Whoa-haw cattle. Gee, Buck! Get out of the way, you two.”

“Give one. Give one, take rest.”

“No!” stormed Davy, stoutly. “None.”

The Indians all were armed with bows and arrows. Suddenly the old Indian with Tall Bull strung his bow like lightning, fitted arrow to string, and Davy found the steel head quivering on taut string within six inches of his chest. The black eyes of the Indian glared into his, the swarthy face was fierce with a scowl of hatred.

Davy did not dare to move; even if he had had a gun or pistol he could not have used it. The arrow would have been through him before he could pull trigger. There he must sit, waiting for the string to be released. His flesh in front of the arrow point shrank and stung, as if already the keen point had driven into it. If the Indian’s finger should slip—!

Half a minute passed; it seemed to Davy like an hour. Tall Bull spoke again.

“Two; give two,” he urged meaningly. “Take rest.”

“TWO; GIVE TWO,” HE URGED, MEANINGLY. “TAKE REST”

Davy shook his head. He felt white and queer, but his mind was made up.

“No,” he answered, trying to speak naturally, but suspecting that his voice was rather shaky. “None.”

The arrow head was still at his breast; the Indian’s bow was still stretched taut until it quivered with the strain; the Indian’s eyes glared, his face scowled. Davy did not glance aside. He was afraid to.

“One,” now urged Tall Bull. “Boy give one, or mebbe boy die an’ lose all.”

Davy shook his head.

“No.”

Now another Indian rode forward. With the corner of his eye Davy saw that he was the Sioux. The Sioux spoke to the two Cheyennes; they grunted answer, and the bow of the old warrior slowly relaxed, as if it hated to.

The Sioux extended his hand to Davy. He was a young buck, and good looking, with a sober cast of features.

“How, cola? (How do you do, friend?)” he said; and Davy shook hands with him. “All right. Brave boy. You go. Take cattle. Goodby.”

“Goodby,” said Davy. He promptly turned the lame steer aside and the others followed. He did not delay a moment. Would the Indians try to stop him again? No; they let him work. Driving the steers he started on the back trail, past the three Indians in the rear. Every moment he expected to feel an arrow plump into him between his shoulders; but he did not even look around. He attended to business. When at last he did look around, the six Indians were riding along at a jog. Davy quickened his pace, and when he arrived with his little bunch at the herd he was glad indeed.

He had proved his mettle. He felt that nobody would have done better.

VII

DAVY CHANGES JOBS

The Reverend Mr. Baxter came on herd soon; and Davy told him about the Indians.

“You might have let them go, Davy,” said Mr. Baxter, “and nobody would have blamed you.”

“Yes, sir; but I couldn’t,” answered Davy.

“Well,” mused Mr. Baxter, gazing at him with a rueful smile, “I don’t believe I could either. But lots of fellows would. Six armed Indians are rather many for one unarmed boy to tackle. But right makes might, Davy.”

“Yes,” agreed Davy. “I guess it does.”

Anyway, Hank Bassett and Sam the cook and the other men in the camp congratulated Davy on his spunk, until he wished that Billy Cody was there to know. But Billy was out with the bull train, and nobody might say when he would turn up again at this end of the trail.

“I guess I’ll send you in with a part of the herd to-morrow, Red,” quoth Hank, as if that were a reward for Davy’s pluck. “How’d you like to see Leavenworth again?”

“First-rate, Mr. Bassett,” answered Davy.

“You and the Reverend can drive a bunch in as soon as we cut ’em out in the morning. Then you’d better report at the office. I don’t think we’ll need you out here till spring.”

That was good word—at least, the Leavenworth trip was. Davy felt as though he would be glad to see people and buildings again and

mingle with the world. Besides, he would be paid off at last, and would have a pocket full of money well earned.

“All right, Davy,” spoke Mr. Baxter, with a grin. “We’ll take in the sights and buy a suit of clothes to boot, won’t we!”

Davy nodded happily.

The herd had drifted near to the great trail again, so he and Mr. Baxter drove their bunch along that route for the fort where they were to be delivered to the company. Riding behind in the dust on one flank while Mr. Baxter rode on the other, Davy felt like a veteran.

The fort was eight miles distant, about three hours drive if they did not hurry. The best of the steers had been cut out from the main herd, so that without difficulty or pushing the trip might easily be made in less than three hours. The trail was still lively, with bull trains and overlanders making their best speed westward, to cross to their destination before the fall storms set in.

One outfit, drawing aside to give the cattle room, hailed Davy with a question. It was an emigrant outfit, of a farm wagon covered with dingy cotton-cloth hood, hauled by a yoke of oxen. A woman holding a baby peered from the seat; a boy and girl about Davy’s age trudged alongside, a sallow, whiskered man, walking, drove with an ox-goad, and a younger man rode a mule.

“How much further to the Cherry Creek gold diggin’s, young feller?” queried the whiskered man.

“About seven hundred miles,” answered Davy.

“When can we see the mountings?” quavered the woman, anxiously.

“Oh, goodness!” laughed Davy. “Not for a long time. You’ve got to cross the plains yet.”

“I didn’t think it was so fur,” she sighed. “Do you hear they’re findin’ lots of gold there?”

“You didn’t come from out thar, did you?” asked the younger man.

“No,” said Davy. “We’ve been herding in the valley here.”

“Keep going and you’ll arrive sometime,” called Mr. Baxter. And he and Davy passed on.

“That’s pretty tough, Dave,” he spoke across as they proceeded in the one direction while the wagon proceeded in the other. “Those people haven’t any more idea where the Cherry Creek country is than these cattle have; but there they go, woman and baby and all. They’ll find what seven hundred miles of ox travel means before they get through. And then they’re liable to be disappointed.”

“Don’t you think there’s any gold out there?” asked Davy.

“Oh, folks have been panning out a little gold for half a dozen years, but it hasn’t amounted to shucks. I’d rather take my chances herding cattle. Expect we’ll know more about it soon now. A gang are out there from Georgia, who know how to mine; and the governor sent out another gang from Lawrence last summer, you know, to locate a town and report back.”

That was so. Davy was familiar with the name “Cherry Creek,” which seemed to be a new gold region lying out at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, near Pike’s Peak. But, like Mr. Baxter, the majority of the herders and teamsters seemed to put little stock in it. They were waiting to “see color,” as some of them who had been to Salt Lake and to California put it.

Behind, a little party of travellers eastward bound along the trail were overtaking the herd. There were three of them mule-back, driving a couple of pack mules. As they passed on Mr. Baxter’s side they cheered and waved good-naturedly.

“Hurrah for Cherry Creek!” they hallooed. “You’re heading the wrong way, pardner.”

“Why?”

“Turn around and make your fortune. That’s why.”

“Already made it,” retorted Mr. Baxter.

“How, stranger?”

“Herding cattle at twenty-five a month and grub. Have you made yours?”

“Mighty near. We’ve seen gold. The Georgia crowd’s been finding it. We’re just back from the Cherry Creek diggin’s. Thar’s plenty color thar, we tell you.”

“Show me some.”

“Hain’t got it, stranger. But it’s thar. We’re goin’ back in the spring. Better join us. Go out an’ buy lots in St. Charles City.”

“No, sir. Buy ’em in Auraria, across the creek,” shouted another. “Auraria’s booming; St. Charles won’t last.”

“Thanks,” laughed Mr. Baxter. “I’ll think about it. Just now twenty-five dollars in the pocket seems better than nothing in a hole in the ground.”

“Wall, you’ll miss out,” warned one of the men as the little party pressed on in a great hurry.

Mr. Baxter laughed and bantered all the way in to Leavenworth.

“We want to see some of that gold before we pack up and go on a wild goose chase, don’t we, Davy?” he called. “And I’d rather have a yoke of steers on the hoof than a city lot on paper.”

This sounded like wisdom; but Davy imagined what an effect the report of those returned Cherry Creekers would have on that emigrant wagon! The men and the woman would be looking for the mountains more eagerly than ever.

He and Mr. Baxter turned the bunch of cattle over to the Russell, Majors & Waddell’s foreman at the fort, where another bull train was being made up, loaded high with government supplies for the west. Buck Bomer, Billy Cody’s wagon-master, had not come in yet from the Laramie trip, and there was no news from Billy himself. He was still out. Report said that he had gone on from Laramie to another fort, so nobody could tell when he would be back.

From the post Davy and Mr. Baxter rode on down to Leavenworth City. Leavenworth never had seemed so busy. New buildings had

gone up, the streets were crowded with people and teams, and the levee was lined with steamboats bound north and south. But the people all were bound west. They had gathered from every quarter of the States. The twang of the Yankee, the drawl of the backwoodsman, and soft slur of the Southerner mingled in a regular hubbub.

Mr. Majors was in his office; Mr. Russell was out somewhere on the trail; Mr. Waddell was down home at Lexington, Missouri, visiting his family. And who should be sitting in a chair in the office but Wild Bill Hickok—as handsome and as gentlemanly as ever.

“Hello, there,” hailed Wild Bill. “How goes it?”

Mr. Baxter nodded cheerily at him.

“Fine,” answered Davy, feeling rather awkward in his worn-out old clothes and his long hair, but not ashamed of what he had been doing.

“I hear you’re making good, boy,” asserted Wild Bill. “I reckon you can hold your own as well as Billy.”

“He certainly can,” claimed Mr. Baxter. “He’s the hero of the camp.”

“Bassett sent you in, did he?” queried Mr. Majors. “How are things at the camp?”

“Same as usual, Mr. Majors,” answered Mr. Baxter. “Davy’s a hero now, I suppose you’ve heard.”

Mr. Majors nodded with his long beard.

“So they say,” he replied simply. “Well, we’re reducing our force out in the cattle camps now, so you two needn’t go back this fall. The cashier’ll pay you off. And—Dick,” he continued to the cashier, “give Davy an order for a suit of clothes with the company’s compliments. Make it clothes, shoes and hat complete.”

Davy blushed hotly, and didn’t know quite what to do. That the word of his adventure with the Indians had reached the office so quickly was very embarrassing. But he was glad to get some clothes,

and Mr. Majors had spoken in earnest, so it would have been bad taste in him to make much ado about what he had or hadn't done. Mr. Majors wasn't a man to say what he didn't mean, or to offer more than anybody deserved. So Davy stammered "Thank you, Mr. Majors," and, clapped heartily on the back by Mr. Baxter, went forward to the cashier.

"Here you are," said the cashier, shoving out the money and the order. "What's the news out yonder? Anybody booming Cherry Creek?"

"Yes. A bunch of men who claimed they were from there passed us coming in," answered Mr. Baxter. "They had a big story about plenty of gold, but we noticed they didn't show any!"

"Color talks," remarked Wild Bill. "When I see color I'm going out thar but not before."

"Yes, we'll all wait a bit," commented Mr. Majors.

"Those new towns out there will make more freight business, Mr. Majors," said Mr. Baxter.

"Shouldn't wonder. We're hauling down from Laramie for them now, and up from Bent's Fort on the Santa Fe trail. There'll have to be a new trail straight across, eventually. But we've got about all the business we can handle. The government work alone takes thirty-five hundred wagons, four thousand men and over forty thousand oxen. We've hauled over sixteen million pounds of government freight, most of it clear through to Utah."

Nearly four thousand wagons, four thousand men, forty thousand bulls! Davy gasped. It certainly was a big company, and he was proud to be working for Russell, Majors & Waddell, even if he was only one in the four thousand.

"Well," said Mr. Majors, "I want to thank you two *men* for your faithful service and if there's anything more I can do for you let me know. Baxter, I suppose you can take care of yourself for a while. What are you going to do, my boy?"

"I don't know," said Davy, in doubt. "Get another job, I guess."

“Save your money. Don’t spend it foolishly. If you want to put it on deposit with us we’ll give you a receipt for it; then you’ll be sure of having it as you need it.”

Davy fingered the gold pieces, making his pocket warm and heavy. There were seven ten-dollar pieces and one five-dollar piece. He would have liked to carry them all around for a time until he could show them to Billy Cody or Billy’s mother. But Mr. Majors’ offer sounded sensible, so he fished out the ten-dollar pieces and passed them over to the cashier.

“I’ll keep five dollars,” he said.

“What are you and the Reverend going to do?” queried Wild Bill. “That is, if it’s any of my business.”

“Oh, Davy can range around with me for a while till he’s settled,” answered Mr. Baxter. “First thing, we’ll get a hair cut. I’m going down to St. Louis later, where I’ve got some folks.”

“Lookee here, Davy,” pursued Wild Bill; “if you haven’t any pressing engagement come on out to the Cody ranch with me. I’m going to ride over thar and the Reverend can do as he pleases. The Codys will sure be glad to see you. Mebbe you can get a job for your schooling this winter. Thar’s a fine school opened again near the Codys, I hear.”

“That’s right. Go to school while you can. You’ll never regret it,” put in Mr. Majors. “Then when all this country’s settled up and you’re among people who can read and write and figure, you won’t be ashamed. Besides, you’ll command more wages. The school house and the church are of more value to this country than the ox teams. The people with schools and churches are here to stay and grow.”

Davy wanted to see the Cody family again, but it seemed rather tame to be going to school when he might be riding the plains. He hesitated a moment until Mr. Baxter said:

“Billy Cody goes to school when he’s home. He’s found out that a little education helps a fellow along. I shouldn’t wonder if his mother turned him into school again this winter when he gets back.”

Since Billy Cody the “Boy Scout” went to school there must be something in it worth while. Davy began to feel that maybe he, too, who was a kind of hero, could afford to take a little time off from making himself famous and attend to making himself more of an all-round man.

“All right,” he said to Wild Bill. “I’ll go and see, anyway.” He shook hands with Mr. Baxter, who promised to keep track of him, and left with Wild Bill.

Mrs. Cody and the girls and Turk the dog were glad indeed to see them. Davy must answer all their questions as to what he had done since he had been there last. He did not mean to say anything about his adventure with the Indians, but Wild Bill told it and praised him, and then there was more ado.

“Billy’ll be pleased to hear that,” declared Mrs. Cody. And she sighed. “I wish he were home.”

“Have you heard from him, Mother Cody?” inquired Wild Bill.

“He sent us word from Fort Laramie that he was going on with a train for another post.”

“He sent us some money, too,” cried Helen, proudly.

“Billy’s a good boy, all right,” nodded Wild Bill.

“I wish he were home, though,” insisted Mrs. Cody, quietly. “He ought to have more schooling. These girls will be far ahead of him. Lack of education will be a great handicap to him after he gets out among cultured people.”

“That’s what we’ve been telling Davy here,” quoth Wild Bill. “The winter’s no time for him to be on the plains, anyway. He’d better be going to school till things open up in the spring. Do you reckon he could get a place hereabouts where he could work for his keep while he went to school? ’Tisn’t a right place for a boy in Leavenworth.”

“Why,” mused Mrs. Cody, flushing, “we’ve always got room for Davy or any friend of Billy’s or yours, Mr. Hickok. Of course, there isn’t much work for an extra hand. You see, when Billy left he hired a man to tend to the farm. But if Davy’ll stay he’s welcome.”

“Oh, Davy’ll stay!” cried the girls, dancing gaily; and Turk barked. “You will stay, won’t you, Davy? We’ll have lots of fun.”

But Davy promptly shook his head.

“I think you’ve got enough,” he said. Mrs. Cody did not look at all strong, and the girls were little. “I guess I’d rather find a place where I can work enough to pay for my keep.”

“Well,” resumed Mrs. Cody, “maybe you would feel more independent, Davy, although you’re welcome to stay right here as long as you like. But there’s a new family on a claim about a mile and a half over yonder. The man’s sick and his wife’s doing too much work. I expect they’d be glad of somebody to tend to the chores. You might go over and see.”

“Come ahead, Davy,” bade Bill.

“You’ll be back and have supper with us and stay all night, won’t you?” invited Mrs. Cody, quickly.

“We’ll get Dave settled first, thank you, Mother Cody,” called back Bill. “Then we’ll be mighty glad to stop off if we come this way.”

“Goodby, Dave,” called the girls. “There’s a splendid school started. We’re all going.”

With Bill, Dave rode to the settler’s house spoken of by Mrs. Cody. That was tremendously kind of Wild Bill, to go to so much trouble for just a boy; but Davy found out that this Mr. Hickok was the kind of a man who would do anything for anybody deserving it.

The new family’s name was Shields. They were from Massachusetts. Mr. Shields had taken up a homestead of 160 acres, and now he was miserable with fever and ague, so that he was unable to work steadily. He and Mrs. Shields and the baby had come by railroad to St. Louis and by steamboat from St. Louis to Leavenworth. There they had loaded their goods into a wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen and had settled on this claim where they had found a cabin already standing.

It wasn’t much of a cabin, being only twelve by eighteen feet square, and built of logs. The floor was of rough boards with wide

cracks between them; torn muslin was stretched as a ceiling to keep the dirt of the sod roof from sifting down. Over the walls Mrs. Shields had pasted newspapers, right side up, so she could read them sometimes as she worked. A muslin curtain, hung on a wire, divided the room; behind the curtain was a bed, of poles laid on notched posts and a mattress stuffed with hay. Clothes were hung on wooden pegs. On the other side of the curtain was a cook stove, and a table of rough-sawed slabs, and a couple of stools.

No, it wasn't much of a place for people like Mr. and Mrs. Shields, who were used to a comfortable house in Massachusetts; but it was home.

All this Davy found out in due time, while he worked for his board and lodging. At night he slept on the floor by the stove; and he must rise at daylight to milk the cow and feed the cow and the oxen and the few chickens, and split the wood and bring the water from the well, and make an early start for school, which was four miles away. After school and on Saturdays he had other chores waiting, and drove the oxen while Mr. Shields held the plough to break the sod for the spring sowing.

VIII

THE GOLD FEVER

Even while Davy had been herding a change had occurred in this Salt Creek Valley. The number of settlers seemed almost to have doubled, and cabins and houses and ploughed fields were everywhere. Amidst them ran the Leavenworth end of the great Overland Trail. Until after the first snows the emigrants and settlers toiled along it, down the hill into the valley and up the hill out of the valley; and all winter the bull trains plodded back and forth. Weather rarely stopped the Russell, Majors & Waddell outfits.

Mr. DeVinne was the teacher in the school. It was the best school yet, according to the Cody girls, because there were more pupils, and Mr. DeVinne seemed to know how to teach. Of course the school was not graded; it consisted of only one room, where the boys and girls sat on long benches, with other benches for desks. The scholars ranged from little Eliza Cody, who was six, up to big boys of twenty. The pupils had come from all over—from Missouri, Illinois, Vermont, Carolina, Mississippi, and the other States east and south. Davy, who had been herding for Russell, Majors & Waddell, and had proved his pluck, felt as big as any of them.

Steve Gobel, who tried to be a kind of boss (when Billy Cody wasn't there), started in to tease Davy, who was little and red-headed. Davy stood the teasing as long as he could; but when Steve grabbed his hair and pulled, saying: "Here, Red! Lemme warm my fingers," Davy flared up. He would have fought Steve then and there, but another boy sprang between them.

"You'd better let him alone, Steve Gobel, or Billy Cody'll give you another licking."

“Yes, he will!” cried Helen Cody and all the girls. “He’s coming back pretty soon now.”

“Aw, he never licked me. He ain’t big enough,” snarled Steve.

“Well, he’s man enough, whether he’s big enough or not,” retorted the boys. And——

“He did, too, lick you. And he’ll do it again as soon as he gets home,” called the Cody girls, loyally.

Steve growled, but he strolled off and after that he let Davy pretty much alone. Davy learned that Steve had bullied Billy Cody, too—until in a fight Billy had been made mad enough to hurt him. Billy was the school’s hero, for he was out on the plains doing a man’s work and helping to support his mother and sisters. Everybody liked Billy if they knew him, or they wanted to see him if they didn’t know him.

The cold, snowy winter of Kansas and a new West set in. The days and nights were below zero, blizzards of wind and snow swept through plains and valleys; and in the frontier cabins the settlers schemed hard to keep warm. His chores at the Shields cabin and his trips to school and back kept Davy busy; but he must make the best of his school term, for when winter quit school would quit too. Once in a while he stopped in at the Cody home; Mrs. Cody was putting up a large house as a hotel and eating place for the overland travellers, particularly the teamsters of the wagon trains. The girls named it “The Valley Grove House.”

Then, in February, who should appear at school but Billy himself.

“Hurrah! There’s Billy Cody!”

“Hello, Red!”

“Hello, Billy.”

“When did you get back, Billy?” asked everybody.

“Yesterday.”

“Where’ve you been this time?”

“Out to Laramie and Fort Walbach at Cheyenne Pass. Been trapping on the Chugwater, south of Laramie, too.”

“How’d you come back? With a bull train?”

“Nope. A couple of fellows and I started with our own pack outfit, but the Injuns jumped us on the Little Blue, and we ran into snow, and we mighty nigh never got through.”

“What you going to do now, Billy?”

“Going to school a while, I reckon.”

And so he did. He also told Davy his adventures. He had been assistant wagon master with Buck Bomer from Leavenworth northwest to Fort Laramie, and from Laramie south sixty miles to new Fort Walbach. After that he had gone trapping, but hadn’t caught much. In December he had started home mule-back with two other “men.” The Indians had chased them in central Kansas, and they had tried to sleep in a cave until they found that it was strewn with skeletons; and a snowstorm had buffeted them, but at last they had reached Leavenworth.

This seemed considerable for a boy of fourteen to have done. Billy brought home his wages, as usual, for his mother, and now he settled down to school again. Davy was very glad to have him back.

Once in a while he and Billy rode into Leavenworth on errands. As the winter wore away rumors of the Pike’s Peak region and the Cherry Creek gold diggings in it grew more and more numerous. A few travellers from that western border of Kansas (for Kansas Territory extended clear to the Rocky Mountains) arrived in Leavenworth and declared that things out in the Pike’s Peak region were booming. Two towns, Auraria and Denver, had been founded on Cherry Creek; and from the sands gold was being washed out. It was claimed that the mines would equal those of California—and they were much nearer to the States.

Soon after Billy had come home he and Davy met Mr. Baxter on the street in Leavenworth. Mr. Baxter looked fine, and shook hands heartily with them.

“What are you doing for yourselves?” he asked.

“Going to school. What are you doing?”

“Oh, visiting ’round, waiting for the trail to open.”

“The green grass will sure look good,” quoth Billy, wisely. “What are you going to do, Reverend? Bull whack?”

“No. I think I’ll strike out for the new Cherry Creek diggings.”

“Thought you didn’t count much on those stories,” reminded Davy.

“I didn’t, but I do now. Just got back from Omaha. Boys, I saw six quills full of gold there from the Pike’s Peak country. Everybody up at Omaha is wild about it. They’re all going. The newspapers from my home town in Massachusetts are full of gold stories. The whole East is excited. By spring you’ll see the biggest crowd starting on the Overland Trail since the days of Forty-nine and the California boom. Leavenworth won’t be big enough to hold the people outfitting here.”

“Hurrah for Cherry Creek, then!” cried Billy. “Reckon we’ll have to go, Davy!”

“I’ll go,” agreed Davy eagerly.

“We’ll all go,” said Mr. Baxter. “Everybody’ll go.”

A lean, sallow, unshaven man in jeans and flannel shirt and boots and a huge muffler around his neck and a round fur cap on his head had been standing near. He nodded.

“Right you are, pards,” he put in. “That’s the place.”

“How do you know?” queried Billy, quickly.

“I’ve been thar, an’ now I’ve come back to tell my friends. Why, boys, out thar all you’ve got to do is to pull up the grass by the roots an’ shake out the gold. Pike’s Peak is solid gold, ’most. A feller can make a flat-bottom boat an’ set knives in the hull an’ slide down, scraping up the gold in slivers.”

“Did you ever see that done?” demanded Mr. Baxter.

“Not exac’ly, stranger. But I’m goin’ to do it.”

That sounded like a tall story—although of course it *might* be true. Billy and Mr. Baxter put small stock in the tale; but it filled Davy's mind with delightful visions. He dreamed of taking a plough up Pike's Peak and ploughing golden furrows clear to the bottom.

Suddenly Salt Creek Valley and all the frontier along the Missouri River from St. Louis up to Omaha was excited. The Leavenworth papers printed wonderful stories of the new gold fields, where miners were washing out the precious metal. The Georgia party of miners, some of whom were Cherokee Indians, which had outfitted at Leavenworth last fall and had gone out by the southwest Santa Fe Trail to the mountains and thence north to Cherry Creek, had "struck it rich," and had sent back the quills of gold to prove it. Already emigrants from the East were arriving in Leavenworth, wild to push on as soon as the spring opened. Between themselves Billy and Dave determined to join the crowd. It was all they could do to wait.

One day early in March Davy was making a brief call at the Cody house, when Billy excitedly pointed from the front porch.

"There's the first one!" he cried. "There's the first prairie schooner bound for the diggings! Let's go down and meet it!"

Away he rushed; Davy followed, and so did the girls. Mrs. Cody stood shading her eyes, watching. Across the valley crept a white-topped wagon drawn by two yoke of oxen. Beside the wagon was trudging a man, and behind followed another man pushing a two-wheeled cart. When Billy and Dave met the outfit they saw that two women were in the big wagon; one held a baby; on the other side of the wagon were sturdily trudging a boy and girl. A big shaggy dog barked at Turk, and Turk growled back.

The wagon was a farm wagon covered with the cotton hood and stuffed with household goods. On the sides the hood bore, in scrawly black paint: "PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST."

"Hello!" hailed Billy. "Where you bound?"

"To the new diggin's, stranger," responded the driver of the oxen. "See our sign?"

“Do you live hyar’bouts?” asked the man who was pushing the hand-cart—which also was loaded with household stuff and camp stuff. The ox-team paused; the man pushing the hand-cart wiped his forehead with a red handkerchief.

“Yes; we live up yonder near the top of the hill.”

“How long do you reckon it’ll take us to get to Cherry Creek?” pursued the ox-team driver.

“Two months if you keep going,” said Billy.

“’Twon’t take as long as that, stranger,” replied the man. “We can travel right smart.”

“They do say you can dig out the gold with a shovel,” quavered the woman. “We hear tell you can dig out a pound a day. Were you ever there?”

“No,” answered Billy. “But we’re going. Aren’t you a little early?”

“Wall, we reckoned we’d start ’arly, an’ make our pile ’fore the other folks got thar,” explained the driver. “Thar’s a tarnel lot o’ people gathered behind us, an’ those that come later won’t find ’nough grass for their critters. Gee-up, Buck! Spot! Get along with you.”

Creaking, the wagon resumed its way. The man with the hand-cart pushed in the wake. The mud was ankle deep, and Dave felt sorry for the whole outfit.

“Better stop on the hill and rest,” bade Billy. “Guess we can give you some coffee.”

“Nope, thank ye, stranger,” said the driver. “We’re goin’ on through.” And he swung his whip, urging his oxen.

Billy and Dave and the girls raced ahead; and when the wagon and the hand-cart, with the oxen and men alike panting, toiled up hill near the Cody house Mrs. Cody rushed out with a pail of hot coffee. But the emigrants scarcely halted to drink it. Even the women were anxious to proceed, as if already they saw the gold.

“Poor things,” sighed Mrs. Cody, while the girls waved goodby to the two children. “They’ll have a hard time.”

But Billy and Dave watched until the “Pike’s Peak or Bust” sign was only a blur, and the wagon a crawling dot.

“Shucks!” said Billy. “If it wasn’t for mother and school I’d join ’em. But I wouldn’t go by the regular Overland Trail. When we go we’ll take the Smoky Hill trail, Dave; up the Kansas River, to Fort Riley, and on out by the Smoky Hill branch or the Republican. That’s shorter.”

This “Pike’s Peak or Bust” outfit was only the first of a long series of gold-field “pilgrims” (as they were called), all enthusiastic. And soon Leavenworth City was a sight! As Mr. Baxter had predicted, the city was scarcely large enough to hold the new-comers. Two and three steamboats a day arrived, loaded to the gunwales, at the levee, bringing up from St. Louis and Kansas City Eastern and Southern people, their teams and goods.

The streets were thronged with the strangers, young and old, in all kinds of costumes and of all professions—farmers, lawyers, ministers, doctors, merchants, teachers—buying supplies and exchanging opinions. The lodging houses and hotels and spare rooms were overflowing, and around the city and in the vacant lots were hundreds of tents, where were camped overland parties of men and whole families.

A constant procession of “pilgrims” wended slow way through the Salt Creek Valley, past the Cody home and the Shields home, and northwestward to the main Salt Lake Overland Trail which led up the Platte River; at the South Platte they might branch for the “diggin’s” by a cut-off. Many of the wagon hoods bore that queer legend “Pike’s Peak or Bust!” Some men trundled wheel-barrows, loaded, and a few were trying to carry packs through on their backs.

But the greatest procession went out over the new route from Leavenworth southwest to the Kansas River; thence on to Fort Riley at the forks, and either northwest up the Republican branch or west up the Smoky Hill River branch. Still other people travelled by the

Santa Fe Trail—the southernmost trail of all—up the Arkansas River to the mountains, and then north along the base of the mountains past Pike's Peak itself to Cherry Creek and Denver.

Mr. Russell, of Russell, Majors & Waddell, and Mr. John S. Jones put in a stage line to Denver by the Smoky Hill route. It was called the "Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company," Jones & Russell, Proprietors. Two stages, travelling together for protection against the Indians, each drawn by four fine Kentucky mules and carrying six passengers, left Leavenworth every morning for Denver, and covered the 700 rolling miles in ten days. Soon the return stages would be arriving, and everybody was expecting great news. It was calculated that already 25,000 people had started for the diggings. The trails were said to be white with the wagons and the camps.

The streets and the levee of Leavenworth were so full of fascinating sights that Davy took every moment he could spare from chores and school to go in with Billy and look and listen. The best place was in front of the Planters' House Hotel, across the street from the office of Russell, Majors & Waddell. Here the stages started, and here people gathered to bid one another goodby. The conversation was most interesting, as people on the ground called up to passengers in the stages.

"Send us back a sack of gold, John."

"Hold tight to your scalps, boys."

"Let us know how things are. Be sure and write."

"Kill a buffalo for me, Frank. I want a good big hide, remember."

"Leave a message for me on the top of Pike's Peak."

"Look out for the 'Rapahoes.'"

"Goodby, goodby, old fellow."

"Don't forget to give Robinson that package from his wife."

"Most of these people don't know where they're going or why," remarked a man near Davy, to another man. "There'll be much suffering from this mad rush."

He was a tall, slender, erect man of about thirty-five, with long bronzed, florid face, sandy complexion and crisp, sandy beard.

“That’s Lieutenant William T. Sherman, formerly of the Army. He’s practising law here now with Judge Ewing,” said another man, aside, to a companion. In a few more years he would be the famous “General Sherman.”

Billy Cody, too, was of the opinion that the green-horns on the trail would meet with trouble; and in Davy’s opinion Billy ought to know. Already reports were to the effect that the route up the Smoky Hill and the Republican were short of grass and exposed to the Indians, and that the emigrants were being compelled to throw away much of their baggage.

However, this did not stop anybody from starting. Davy and Billy had the gold fever bad. Even Mr. Shields had decided to take his wife and baby and leave the ranch for the diggings, where he counted on making more money in a week than he could make here in a year. So Davy only waited on Billy, to start, himself.

“Shucks!” exclaimed Billy, in May. “I’ve got to quit, Dave, and go on the trail again. Mother said last night ‘All right.’ She’ll let me go. She needs the money and I’ll send her back a lot. Come on. We’ll raise a gang and start.”

“When, Billy?”

“Right away, as soon as we get the men and the outfit. This green grass makes me restless. Got any money left, Dave? We have to buy a wagon and team.”

Yes, Davy had almost all his herding wages on deposit with Mr. Majors. He was proud to say so, and to be able to pay his own way.

IX

THE HEE-HAW EXPRESS

Now Billy wasted no time with the preparations. That was his style. The Reverend Mr. Baxter, who had been ill in Leavenworth, and so had not started before, promptly agreed to join the party. He and Billy and Dave clubbed together with an outfit that Billy knew. These were Jim Barber and Hi Wilson and another man called “Left-over Joe.” Jim and Hi had been teamsters with Russell, Majors & Waddell bull trains; but “Left-over Joe” seemed to be nobody in particular—and that is why they nicknamed him “Left-over Joe.”

A big emigrant outfitting camp had been established in the Salt Creek Valley near the Cody home, and while Jim and Hi were here getting ready to move on, this lean, lank, very long-necked hobbledehoy of squeaky voice and nineteen or twenty years had wandered into their camp and adopted them. So they let him stay.

Jim and Hi had a team of mules: Billy and Dave and Mr. Baxter added an old light wagon. The party thought themselves lucky, for oxen had risen in price to $175 and $200 a yoke, and mules and horses were scarcer yet. Wagons were scarce, too.

By the time that the supplies of salty pork and beans and flour and coffee had been laid in for “grub,” and picks and spades and gold-pans for digging out the gold and separating it, and ammunition for killing game and fighting Indians, Davy’s money was about gone. However, that did not matter. They all would find gold enough to last them the rest of their lives!

Billy owned the Mississippi “yager” smoothbore musket and the two Colt’s navy revolvers that he had used when in the mule fort. He gave Davy one of the revolvers. With it belted at his waist, Davy felt like a regular scout indeed. Hi and Jim also owned guns. Hi’s was a

yager similar to Billy's. Jim's was a heavy Sharp's "Old Reliable" rifle, of fifty calibre holding six cartridges underneath, and one in the breech. It was a tremendously hard-shooting gun. Whoever had a Sharp's "Old Reliable" had the best gun on the plains.

The Reverend Mr. Baxter had no gun at all and did not want one, he claimed. "Left-over Joe" had no gun at all, but wanted one badly. Hi promised to let him shoot the yager sometime.

The Salt Creek camp was a lively place. Here were assembled a thousand emigrants, all "Pike's Peakers," making ready to travel on westward and find their fortunes. About every kind of an outfit was to be seen, and all sorts of people. Many of the men never had driven oxen or mules before; they had bought what they could get; some of the animals proved not to be broken to drive, and when the green-horns tried to hitch up the green "critters" then there was fun for the onlookers.

However, nobody was delaying to watch the "fun." By the hundred, parties were setting out every day from the camp as well as from Leavenworth. Thousands of gold-seekers already had left Omaha and Kansas City and St. Joseph. It was reported that along any of the trails a person could walk from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains on the tops of the prairie schooners—so thick was the travel. It beat the celebrated stampede to California in 1849.

There were four trails to the "diggin's." The two best known were the Santa Fe Trail, on the south, which followed up the Arkansas River in southern Kansas, to the mountains, and then turned north for the gold fields; and the big Salt Lake Overland Trail, on the north, which from the Missouri River followed up the Platte River, until in western Nebraska the gold hunters turned south for Pike's Peak. Omaha and St. Joseph were the outfitting points for this northern trail, and Leavenworth traffic struck it by the government road which ran through Salt Creek Valley on into the northwest. The Russell, Majors & Waddell "bull trains" hauled their freight over this route.

The other two trails were new central trails, made especially for the Pike's Peak rush. One trail followed up the Republican River through southern Nebraska; the other followed up along the Smoky

Hill Fork River, through central Kansas. Emigrants coming in by St. Joseph were taking either the Salt Lake and California Overland route or the Republican route; the emigrants outfitting at Leavenworth and the Salt Creek Valley were taking the Smoky Hill route or else the Overland Trail route.

By the Overland Trail (the Salt Lake and California Trail) it was accounted 580 miles from Omaha to the diggin's; and the Pike's Peak Guide-book recommended that trail. But from Leavenworth it was 100 miles further, and the Smoky Hill Trail was said to be the straightest and the shortest. The Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company stages had chosen that route.

"I reckon that's the route for us," said Hi. "I hear we can follow the Smoky clear to the mountains, and have water all the way."

"When the first stage comes back we'll know more about it, but we can't wait," mused the Reverend Mr. Baxter.

"Oh, we'll get through," spoke Billy, quickly. "And the sooner we start the better, before all the grass and fuel are used up. Look at the people, will you, pulling out every day!"

"Do you think one wagon will be enough to bring back our gold?" squeaked Left-over, anxiously. "I don't want to quit till I get a million dollars' worth for myself alone."

"Then what'll you do, Left-over?" asked Jim, with a wink at the rest.

Left-over Joe scratched his long freckled neck and looked like a chicken.

"I'd buy a gun and have all the pie I wanted, too," he declared foolishly.

Now everything had been made ready. The night before the start Billy and Dave spent in camp with the rest of the party. Mr. Shields and family had gone; their log cabin was empty, their claim abandoned again. If they had stayed they could have made lots of money selling produce to the emigrants; but they, like the thousands of others, wished to get rich quick.

This last evening in the Salt Creek emigrant camp the party elected their officers. Hi was chosen captain or wagon-master, Billy was chosen lieutenant or assistant, Mr. Baxter volunteered to cook, and “Left-over” was appointed “cavarango” or herder of the two mules. This left Jim and Davy for the general work of march and camp.

With the provisions and bedding and mining tools and other stuff the wagon was well loaded for two mules to haul across the plains; so it was decided that all the party except the driver must walk. They would take turns driving and riding; and after the mules were well broken in and the trail was rougher then probably nobody would ride.

“I reckon we ought to make twenty miles a day, with mules,” quoth Billy, wisely. “But those oxen the other folks are using won’t make more than twelve or fifteen miles a day. Some of ’em are liable to be sixty days on the road.”

“Well, we’ll be lucky if we get through in thirty,” said Mr. Baxter. “It will be nearer forty.”

“Do we have to walk forty days?” squealed “Left-over.”

“That’s nothing to a bull whacker,” said Hi, gruffly. “I’ve walked clean from Leavenworth to Salt Lake and back again.”

“So have I,” nodded Jim. “That’s twelve hundred miles each way—and most of it up-hill, too!”

The Smoky Hill Fork trail was to be struck at Fort Riley, 132 miles southwest from Leavenworth. Here the Smoky Hill Fork and the Republican Rivers joined to form the Kaw or Kansas River. Settlements extended to Fort Riley and a short distance beyond; but after that the country was the “Indian Country.”

“Lookee here,” suddenly exclaimed Billy Cody, that last night before the start, when everybody was under blankets and almost asleep. “We’ve got to have a name painted on our wagon.”

“Can’t we travel anonymous?” queried the Reverend Mr. Baxter, sleepily.

“I dunno what that means but it sounds pretty good,” spoke Hi. “Can you spell it?”

“Oh,” chuckled Mr. Baxter, “that doesn’t mean anything.”

“Huh!” grumbled Hi. “I thought it was an animile like a hippopotamus, mebbe.”

When the camp turned out at sunrise Billy had already been up, and on the wagon hood he had painted, with the stick and tar-pot used for greasing the wagon, the title: “HEE-HAW EXPRESS.” So, amidst laughter, the Hee-Haw Express it was which, soon after sun-up, joined the procession that, anew each day, filed out for the long trail to Pike’s Peak.

The Hee-Haw Express, being mule-power, travelled faster than many of the other outfits. The road certainly presented a series of strange sights, as if everybody had thrown together whatever he could and was hastening from a fire or a plague. The Hee-Haw Express, at amble and fast walk, with Hi driving and his partners trudging as fast as they were able beside, gradually passed men with packs, men pushing handcarts and wheel-barrows, crippled ox teams, next an ox and a cow harnessed together, next a mule and an ox harnessed together; and so forth and so forth, all in the dust and the shouting and the rumbling and creaking and whip cracking.

Almost all the other “Pike’s Peak pilgrims” passed by the Hee-Haw Express waved and shouted their greetings.

“Trade you my wheel-barrow for a mule.”

“You must be in a rush, strangers.”

“What’s the fare?”

To this Billy answered gaily:

“Regular stage rates. Twenty-five cents a mile or hundred dollars to the mountains.”

For that was what the Leavenworth & Pike’s Peak Express Company charged.

Many of the other wagons also bore signs. “Pike’s Peak or Bust!” “Noah’s Ark!” “Root Hog or Die!” “Pike’s Peak Special!” “Bound For the Diggin’s!”—thus ran some of the lines to be noted as the Hee-Haw Express sturdily pressed forward.

That night the road was one continuous camp, with fires glowing and canvas glimmering as far as the eye could see in either direction. Parties visited back and forth, men and women exchanged news and views, children played in the firelight shadows, babies cried, dogs barked, and not until after nine o’clock was the trail quiet enough so that nervous persons might sleep. However, Davy was not nervous; and from the snores he might judge that Billy and the rest were not nervous either.

The next day the Hee-Haw Express started early, and was on the road even before sun-up. Billy and Hi and all were anxious to pass Fort Riley and strike the Smoky Hill Fork as soon as possible, and in advance of as many of these “pilgrims” as possible. The only excitement of this day was a sudden cheer adown the line and a craning of necks and waving of hands. Before, from the west, were approaching two vehicles—by the looks of them, and by the four mules, stages, both!

And two stages they proved to be, as, skirting the procession of “pilgrims,” they dashed along, bound for Leavenworth. The first bore a lot of bright bunting and streamers, and on its sides a banner that said: “Greetings from the Gold Mountains of Kansas.” By its dusty appearance and the appearance of its driver and passengers, this coach evidently had come clear from Pike’s Peak. The second coach, close following, was its escort from Fort Riley in to Leavenworth.

Speedily the word travelled through the column of Pike’s Peakers that the first coach actually was the first return coach from the gold mines, and that it carried to Leavenworth $3500 in gold dust. Leavenworth, as was afterwards reported, had a big celebration.

Of course, the sight of the travel-stained coach, and the rumors as to what it contained and what news it bore, excited the emigrants. Some of them began to throw away stuff in order to lighten their

loads; so that from here on to Fort Riley the trail was strewn with what Billy called “useless plunder.” But the Hee-Haw party were experienced enough to start out only with what they needed, and they had nothing to throw away yet.

The last of the settlements was Junction City, just beyond Fort Riley. While the rest of the party were making camp along with the other “pilgrims,” outside the little town, Billy and Dave rode the mules in to see if there were any provisions worth buying. Mr. Baxter, the cook, said that if they could find any dried apples he would make a pie!

But there were no dried apples or any other such delicacies in rude little Junction City, here at the edge of the Indian country. Every store seemed to be a saloon; and the streets were thronged with rough emigrants and soldiers from the fort. Only whom did the boys meet but Wild Bill Hickok!

He was standing on the edge of the plank sidewalk of the one business street, with several other men, apparently expecting something.

“Why, hello, Bill!”

“Hello, Billy. How are you, Dave? Where’d you come from, if I may ask?”

“Salt Creek,” answered Billy Cody.

“Going to Pike’s Peak,” announced Davy.

“Good enough,” approved Wild Bill. “People are taking a little gold out o’ thar, that’s sure. But I don’t believe all I hear.”

“What are you doing here, Bill?”

“I? Well, I may go to the diggin’s myself, and I may drive stage. To-day’s stage westbound is due now. That’s what we’re looking for.”

“She’s a comin’,” remarked one of the other men, with a nod.

Sure enough, up the trail from the east, along the north bank of the Smoky Hill Fork, in the dusk and the dust came at a gallop the Leavenworth stage for the Pike’s Peak country, drawn by its four fine

mules. It halted before the Junction House Hotel, and the passengers clambered stiffly out from under the canvas top that arched over the wagon box.

They were only two, and one from the driver's box. The two plainly enough were Easterners. The first was a rather young man, with a thin sandy beard and a soft slouch hat; the second was a stoutish, elderly man, with a round rosy face and a fringe of white whiskers under his chin. He wore a rather dingy whitish coat; the younger man wore a regulation duster. They both gazed about them alertly before entering the hotel.

"Hello, Bill," nodded the stage driver, descending, after tossing his lines to the hostler from the stage stable—for Junction City was Station Number Seven on the stage route.

"Who's yore load, Tom?" queried somebody.

"That old fellow in the white coat, he's Horace Greeley. Other fellow's named Richardson—Albert D. Richardson."

"Where they from?"

"N' York, I reckon."

"Where they going?"

"Out to the diggin's."

"What line they in?"

"Newspaper fellows of some sort, I hear tell. Anyhow, they ask a heap of questions. That old chap in the white coat he's been speech-makin' all through Kansas. As I understand it, he an' that young fellow are goin' out to the mines to write up the country, so the people of the East'll know what's true an' what ain't." And Tom the driver walked on into the hotel to wash and eat.

"Seems to me I've heard of Horace Greeley," mused Wild Bill. "He's quite a man."

"Sure. He's editor of the New York *Tribune*," asserted a man who had not spoken before. "He's the biggest man on the biggest paper in the States, and what he says will influence the people more than a

stage-load of gold. Richardson's a newspaper man, too; and another reporter, named Henry Villard, of Cincinnati, is out at the diggin's now. But Greeley's the biggest of the lot. They say only one printer in his office can read his writing; but the old man has come out here to get the truth, and if he tells the people to 'go West' they'll go."

"That," quoth Wild Bill emphatically, "is the best thing that's ever happened to this country. But it seems to me it's a lot of trouble for a man to take. Do you reckon he's going to start a paper out thar at Cherry Creek?"

"No, sir! They say Horace Greeley is wedded to two things: his New York *Tribune* and his old white coat."

"Well, if he makes any speech here to-night I'm going to hear him," said Wild Bill.

Horace Greeley did make a speech to citizens and emigrants, in a partly-finished stone church. He talked on "Republicanism." But Dave and Billy and Hi and Jim and "Left-over" were too tired to go and hear him; and so were the majority of the "pilgrims." The Reverend Mr. Baxter went in and reported that it was very good for those who agreed with it.

Bearing Horace Greeley and Journalist Richardson, the stage continued westward in the morning. So did the Hee-Haw Express.

X

“PIKE’S PEAK OR BUST!”

Already the procession had considerably thinned out. Some of the outfits had broken down and some had quit discouraged. The Pike’s Peak region was still 500 miles distant, and the worst of the journey lay before. However, the Hee-Haw Express had no thought of quitting.

“We’ll have to travel under discipline from now on, boys,” spoke Captain Hi at noon camp. “You bear in mind I’m boss, and Billy is second boss. We’ll try to be as easy on you as we can, but what we say goes. The only person who doesn’t need to pay much attention is the cook. He’s his own boss. The rest of us will mount guard every night and follow a regular schedule. I appoint Jim the official hunter, because he’s got the best gun. Jim, you watch out for meat. Ought to see buffalo, plenty.” And Jim nodded. “Davy, you’re assistant to the cook. You get him fuel and water.” And Davy nodded. “Left-over and Billy and I’ll tend to the mules.”

“What I want to know is, why don’t we ever have pie. If I’d thought we’d eat just bacon and beans and coffee all the way across to the mountains I wouldn’t have come,” squeaked Left-over, earnestly.

“Sowbelly and beans will make a man of you,” growled Hi. “After you’ve stood a steady diet of that for a couple o’ months nothing can kill yuh.” And he rose. “All right; catch up, boys. Let’s be moving.”

“Catch up” (or “Ketch up,” as Hi pronounced it) was the regulation signal in the freighters’ trains on the plains for harnessing the mules and oxen to the wagons. So now the span of mules were put back into their places on either side of the tongue, and Left-over climbed into the seat; it was his turn to drive.

Just before sunset Left-over, peering ahead from his driver's seat, uttered a shrill whoop and tried to whip up his mules.

"Hyar! What're you aiming to do?" demanded Captain Hi, severely.

"Aw, can't you let a feller be?" whined Left-over. "I was going on ahead, is all, and see what I could buy."

On a little hillock, before, beside the trail was what appeared to be another stage station of canvas, but the top of the tent (for wall tent it turned out to be) displayed in large black letters the sign: "Grocery." This explained Left-over's hurry. However, as the nearest "pilgrims" were behind he would have the grocery to himself, so Captain Hi calmed him down with—

"Don't be so brash about it, then. If you go and kill off one of those mules we'll put you in harness with the other one."

"And that will be a pair," added Billy, quick as a wink.

"Never mind, Left-over," comforted the Reverend. "Maybe we can get our dried apples there and have that pie I promised you."

But as they toiled on nearer, the tent grocery seemed deserted. It had no customers and no proprietor.

"Whoa!" yelled Left-over loudly, pulling down his mules opposite the tent. "Whoa, there!" And—"Hello," he hailed shrilly.

At this slowly emerged from between two large barrels the figure of a gaunt, frowsy-headed man—like a dog crawling out of a kennel. The man must have been asleep. He yawned and stretched and stared.

"Howdy?"

"Howdy, strangers."

"What do you keep?"

"Everything."

"Got any dried apples?" demanded Left-over, eagerly.

"Nary apple."

“Got any crackers?”

“Nary cracker.”

“Any ham?” queried Hi.

“Nary ham.”

“Any molasses?” asked Billy.

“Nary molasses.”

“Any salt?” asked Jim.

“Nary salt.”

“What have you got, then?”

“Pickles and smokin’ tobacco, strangers. Which’ll you have?”

“That’s a great grocery stock!” scoffed Billy, as the Hee-Haw party proceeded. “Pickles and smoking tobacco!”

“I should say!” agreed Davy. “Not much chance for a pie there!”

“I didn’t s’pose the country was going to be as bad as this,” whined Left-over, from the wagon seat.

“Wait till you strike the wust of it,” answered Jim.

“Somebody’s broken down ahead, hasn’t he?” queried the Reverend Mr. Baxter.

“Looks so. We’ll go on and make camp there, anyway, and see,” directed Captain Hi.

The trail had veered apart from the Smoky Hill Fork and was cutting through a wide, flat bottom-land, grown to short buffalo grass and a few cottonwood trees. In the midst of the stretch was a “prairie schooner,” halted, its white hood just visible in the gathering dusk. Lonely enough it looked, too—solitary there with not another token of human life near it. It did not have even a camp-fire.

In the twilight the Hee-Haw Express drew upon it and halted also. The owner of the wagon was sitting on the tongue, smoking an old clay pipe.

“Howdy, strangers?” he greeted, coolly.

“Howdy,” they responded; and suddenly Billy nudged Davy and pointed to the wagon hood.

“Pike’s Peak or Bust!” said the one sign; and under that had been added: “Busted, by Thunder!”

“What’s the matter, pardner? Stuck?” asked Captain Hi.

The man jerked his thumb toward the wagon hood.

“Read for yoreself, stranger,” he bade. “Busted!”

“Where’s your party?”

“I’m the party. I sent the old woman and the kids back by stage, and I air hyar and hyar I stay, I reckon.”

“Where are your animals?”

“My critters war a hoss and a caow, hitched together. Injuns stole my hoss; the old caow’s had a calf daown in the willows; and I’m busted. How far to Pike’s Peak yet?”

“’Bout five hundred miles.”

“Wall,” drawled the man, yawning, “in case my old woman doesn’t find another outfit back at the Missouri I reckon I can wait till the calf grows up.”

“Nothing we can do for you?” invited Mr. Baxter.

The man slowly shook his head.

“Nope, stranger. I air comfortable. ’Bout two miles on you’ll find a better campin’ place. Water and fuel right around hyar I’m goin’ to need, myself.”

So, thus politely dismissed, the Hee-Haw Express moved along until, where the trail crossed a creek, they found the wood and water.

The trail stretched ever on and on. For one only six or eight weeks old it was remarkable. Hundreds of wagons and animals had worn it wide and plain; and, moreover, on either side of it were scattered cook-stoves, trunks, bedsteads, bureaus, and other bulky household

stuff, cast overboard to relieve the tiring teams. Davy found a rag doll and Billy picked up a thick hank of false hair. As Jim remarked: “A fellow could follow this trail in the dark by stubbing his toes!”

“Busted” outfits were constantly passed. The strain of the wild march to “Pike’s Peak” was taking its toll of the weak and the illy prepared.

The stage stations were placed from ten to twenty miles apart. They had been located in a hurry; wagons sent out from Leavenworth by Jones & Russell had dropped off the station agents and their outfits as fast as possible all the way through to Denver. Some of the stations were merely pieces of canvas laid over pole frames; and some were caves in clay banks of streams; but under the canvas and in the caves were living not only men but their wives.

However, the fact that the stations had been established at all in such a rush across 600 miles of uninhabited country struck Davy as no small feat. And every day, on this Smoky Hill route trail, a stage coming from the west was met, and another coming from the east passed them. The stages went galloping along hauled by four dusty mules. The report was that the company had spent three hundred thousand dollars before the first coach had been started, and that the expenses were eight hundred dollars a day! The fare from Leavenworth to Denver was $100.

The sight of the two stages each day was quite an event to the toiling Pike’s Peak Pilgrims, and they levelled all kinds of questions at driver and passengers whenever they had a chance.

The trail did not cling to the Smoky Hill Fork, but frequently was far north of it. Numerous side creeks were crossed, supplying water and wood; and again there would be no fuel but the gleaning of buffalo chips. The country was flattening out into short-grass plains—buffalo country.

Captain Hi and Lieutenant Billy saw to it that the span of mules were well attended to at noon and at evening, and that the daily marches of the Hee-Haw Express were steady and systematic. So the party forged straight along. The mules were fast walkers.

“Strangers, you must be in a powerful hurry to dig out that pound of gold a day,” hailed a “Lightning Express” that the “Hee-Haw” passed.

This Lightning Express was taking a whole sawmill out—as well as a large family. The household wagon bore the sign “Lightning Express”; it was drawn by a mule and an ox, pulling together. Then followed a freighting wagon loaded with the sawmill, and drawn by a yoke of oxen and a horse, the horse being in front of the yoke of oxen. A woman and several children were trudging beside the covered wagon. A man afoot drove with his whip.

“Right you are,” replied Captain Hi to the hail.

“Have you heard any news?” quavered the woman. “Is it true that people are putting knives in the bottom of their wagon-boxes and sliding down Pike’s Peak and scraping up the gold in big slivers?”

“I’ve heard about it but I’ve never seen it, ma’am,” said Hi, truthfully.

“When do we see the mountains?”

“Oh, not for a few hundred miles more,” informed the Reverend, kindly.

“Well, when you get there and see Jacob Smith from Posey County, Injianny, tell him we’re coming as fast as we can,” she called after them.

“We will.”

“Shouldn’t wonder if that was Jacob Smith or some other pilgrim on his way back already,” proclaimed Jim, pointing. “Reckon he’s made his pile and is heading home to spend it.”

“Wish we were doing the same!” squeaked Left-over. “I’d buy pie; all I could eat.”

“I don’t,” announced Billy Cody. “Do you, Dave! I want the fun of finding before I have the fun of spending.”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Baxter; “it’s a heap more fun to earn what you get.”

A man on horseback was wending way down the trail from the west. It was an exception to meet anybody travelling east; he was the first since they had left the stage line. If he came from the Pike's Peak country he ought to bring much news.

So, as he met them, Captain Hi halted the Hee-Haw Express and hailed him.

"Howdy, stranger? Bound far?"

"To the States if I can get there."

"Come from far?"

"Far enough, mister. I come from the Cherry Creek diggin's."

Hurrah! Davy had been eyeing him keenly. He was an unshaven, thin but powerful man, with cadaverous face and fierce black eyes; and he bestrode a mule as cadaverous as himself. He carried a musket; and that seemed to be about all. Anyway, his saddle-bags were disappointingly flat. But he may have had his gold stowed out of sight or deposited to his account somewhere.

"Clear from the diggin's, eh?" pursued Hi. "How are things out thar? Booming?"

The man stroked his black beard and surveyed the party.

"Do I look booming, mister?" he demanded. "I wouldn't give an acre in old Missouri for the whole of the Pike's Peak country. You going out yonder after gold?"

"Yes."

"Wall, you're on the hardest trail you ever tackled, mister; no wood, no water, no forage, and game mighty scarce. And when you get to the end you won't find much. That story about gold is the biggest hoax ever invented. From now on you'll meet about as many people turned back as there are going on."

"What's the matter? Isn't there any gold at all?" asked Billy, dismayed.

"Mighty little and hard to get."

“I’m going on just the same and see,” said Billy, doggedly.

“We’re with you, Billy,” encouraged the Reverend. And—“What’s happening out there, anyway?” he queried of the returning pilgrim. “We hear that twenty thousand people are on the road.”

“They’ve made two towns on Cherry Creek; one’s Auraria, t’other’s called Denver now. They’ve had a meeting, too, and organized to send a delegate to Congress from the Territory of Jefferson; and the first Monday in June they held a convention to form the State of Jefferson. That was after I left, so I dunno what you will find when you get there. But you won’t find gold; at least not to amount to anything. And my advice is turn around now ’fore you starve to death.”

With that, he clapped his heels against his mule, and continued. So did the Hee-Haw Express—but in the opposite direction.

“I reckon,” said Captain Hi, “we’ll keep going. Little Billy said it.”

That was a great disappointment—to have such a report. The man seemed to have spoken the truth, for from now on the returning goldseekers rapidly increased in numbers, and they all insisted that the Pike’s Peak country was a hoax, and the trail to it very bad. Indeed, many “pilgrims” were turning back without having reached the “diggin’s” at all.

The Hee-Haw party were now well out in the midst of the Great Plains which stretched from the Missouri to the Rocky Mountains. Afar extended on either hand and before and behind, the rolling, sandy surface, covered with the short, woolly buffalo grass, and broken here and there by little hills and occasional willows and cottonwoods growing by the creeks. Jack-rabbits, as large as fox-terriers, and prairie-dogs and coyotes and gray wolves and antelope scampered from the trail, and the paths made by the buffalo frequently crossed and recrossed.

These paths were worn deep, like bridle paths. Jim kept the camp in fresh meat from the antelope that he shot. He stalked them very cleverly, as Dave thought, by lying out in the brush, and waving his handkerchief from the end of his wiping stick. The flag seemed to

fascinate the curious-minded antelope, who edged nearer and nearer to him, circling around and around and peering and stamping, until he shot what he wished, at his leisure.

The meat was tender and sweet, but according to Billy and the others, it was nothing compared with buffalo meat. Buffalo meat gave more strength, and Billy claimed that anybody could eat it for weeks at a time and not tire of it. So they all wanted buffalo—and especially Left-over. He was clamorous to shoot a buffalo, and began to whine about it continually.

“Lookee here, Left-over,” finally spoke Jim. “If we let you shoot a buffalo will you quit this etarnel gab about that and pie?”

“I will. Truly I will, Jim,” promised Left-over.

“All right, then. As soon as we sight buffalo, where we can get at ’em, you can shoot one, and after that shut up till we get to Denver.”

“With your gun, Jim?”

“Yes, with my gun.”

Only a few buffalo had been seen thus far. The “pilgrim” travel on the trail had split their herds and had made them wary. But on the very next day it was that Billy, driving the laboring mules, from the wagon seat whooped exultantly:

“Buffalo! Plenty o’ ’em. There’s yore chance, Left-over.”

Left-over came running from the rear.

“Where, Billy?”

“Over there, of course. Don’t you see them?” and Billy reined in his mules.

“I see ’em! I see ’em!” yelled Left-over, much excited. “Where’s my gun? Is it loaded? How’ll I get ’em?”

He would have grabbed the gun from Jim and have set right out afoot, but Captain Hi and Jim both stopped him.

“Easy, easy, now!” exclaimed Hi, gazing calculatingly. “Thar’s buffalo enough for all, I reckon. Must be two thousand. But if you try

to run ’em down on foot we’ll lose every one. Let’s unharness the mules, fust.”

Left-over promptly jumped to help. The buffalo were plain in sight. To the right of the trail, slightly ahead and just out of gun-shot, they were grazing in a great herd which speckled the landscape like a mass of gooseberry bushes.

“Looks as if we had ’em all to ourselves,” quoth Jim, as the mules were speedily unharnessed from the wagon. “No ‘pilgrims’ around to interfere with this herd. Reckon if we don’t get a mess it will be our own fault.”

“Where do I come in?” whined Left-over, anxiously. “You promised me, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did, and I never break a promise. Hyar’s your gun, now. You stay right whar you are. We’ll drive the buffalo in to you. Otherwise you’ll jest shoot up the landscape and mebbe yourself or us in the bargain. Lend me one of your shooting-irons, Billy. The pistol’s enough. Thanks.”

So saying, he vaulted on one of the mules, Hi did the same. They rode bareback with the traces tied short, and used the coiled lines as bridle-reins. Hi carried his long-barrelled Mississippi yager, Jim held the Colt’s navy revolver in his right hand. On a wide circuit they set out, as if to get behind the buffalo and turn them toward the wagon.

“What are we goin’ to do? Where do we come in?” wildly appealed Left-over.

“We stay here, I reckon,” said Billy coolly.

“You and Davy and Left-over can whang away,” bade Mr. Baxter, with a laugh. “I’ll sit in the reserved seat and see the fun.”

So saying, he calmly clambered aboard and into the seat, where he stowed himself at languid ease.

“If those mules aren’t broken to buffalo there won’t be any fun—except for the buffalo,” observed Billy.

“Yes, Hi and Jim are liable to be stampeded clear back into Leavenworth,” chuckled Mr. Baxter.

With the four at the wagon keenly watching, Hi and Jim pursued their circuit. They rode at rapid gallop, and presently disappeared in a shallow draw. The next sign of them was the action of the buffalo herd. Animals on the farther outskirts began to lift their heads and stare and show uneasiness. Gradually the whole herd were staring in the one direction; and on a sudden, like a vast blanket tossed by the wind, forth they lunged into motion. And with reason, for out into the open, on the far side of them, came racing hard on their long-eared mules, Hi and Jim.

“Hurrah!” cried Billy Cody, exultant. “Those mules are O. K. Lie low and stay by the wagon, fellows. Meat’s coming.”

“What’ll I do?” yelled Left-over. “Where’ll I go?

“You do as I say,” ordered Billy, thoroughly alive. “Stay right here. We may have to split that herd.”

On blundered the buffalo. The roll of their hoofs sounded like heavy thunder, and the dust floated over their dark backs. Pressing valiantly, Hi and Jim held their mules in the rear, and, still circuiting, forced the herd over toward the wagon.

“Great Cæsar’s ghost, boys!” gasped Mr. Baxter, straightening in his seat. “Don’t forget that I’m up aloft here, and I’ll land hard if that herd strikes us!”

The herd arrived almost before he had finished speaking. The foremost—a big cow in the lead—went streaming past just in front of the wagon; and the whole van of the shaggy, crazy army loomed in one grand charge on either hand.

“I’ll tend to this side; you and Left-over tend to the other,” shouted Billy to Dave. “Give it to them! Split ’em! Split ’em! Wave yore hat, Reverend.”

“GIVE IT TO THEM! SPLIT ’EM! SPLIT ’EM!”

“Now’s your chance, Left-over,” exclaimed Dave, levelling his revolver.

The Reverend waved his broad hat and shouted lustily.

“Bang!” spoke Billy’s yager. Davy pointed his revolver at the nearest buffalo and pulled trigger. He dimly saw the huge creature plunge forward to its knees, but he did not wait to see more; he only pulled trigger as fast as he could right into the faces of the pelting herd. He had a vague vision of bulging eyes and lolling red tongues, and short horns and tangled foreheads and lunging shoulders, and ever the dark, panting mass flowed past.

Suddenly a tremendous report in his ear well-nigh deafened him, and Left-over yelped loudly, crying, “I got him! I got him!”

“Hooray!” screamed the Reverend, choking with glee, and laughing so that he doubled and swayed.

Left-over was on his back, heels high, gun waving. He sat up, pulled trigger, and over he went again, kicked flat by the heavy Sharp’s. At every shot he yelped, sprawled backward, sat up, shot, and yelped again.

Davy’s revolver was emptied, and he had space to watch. Now Left-over’s gun was empty, too; and dusty and perspiring and wild-eyed, he picked himself up.

“How many did I kill?” he squealed hoarsely. “Are all those mine?”

For the herd had passed, the wagon was untouched, and the chief token of the battle was the half dozen bulky forms lying prone almost in the very trail itself. Davy drew a long breath. That had been an exciting moment. Hi and Jim came galloping in, their mules lathered and puffing.

XI

SOME HALTS BY THE WAY

“Good work,” praised Hi, with casual glance. “Thar are three or four more out yonder. Reckon we’ve got meat enough now for a while.”

“Which are mine?” squealed Left-over. “Did you other fellows kill any? I’d have killed fifty if I’d had any more cartridges.”

“You killed one, all right, Left-over,” asserted the Reverend. “I saw you. You killed him six times and once more for luck.”

“No, I didn’t, either!” disputed Left-over. “I killed seven, mebbe more. I shot seven times.”

“Which is it, Reverend?” asked Hi.

The Reverend Mr. Baxter pointed, with a grin; and grinning, Hi and Jim rode forward to inspect. Davy went, too; he was certain that a couple of buffalo had fallen to his revolver, and as there were only three on this end of the wagon, he did not see where Left-over’s seven could be.

Hi and Jim were gazing down upon a huge buffalo bull, who lay with his nose touching the fore wheel of the wagon. He made a great pool of blood, which flowed from wounds in his head and his shoulders and back and legs and everywhere, apparently.

“You certainly peppered him, Left-over,” assured Hi. “I reckon he’s dead.”

“Did I do all that?” queried Left-over. And he began to strut. “Well, I think that’s pretty good. If I hadn’t been here he’d have run right over the wagon. I picked him out on purpose. But I must have killed a lot more.” And chattering and strutting he roamed about, every few

seconds returning to examine the holes that he had made or to thrust the carcass with his toes or to proclaim how large it was.

“You surely made your mark. Now you can rest a while,” chuckled Jim. “What’s your count, Billy?”

“Two at my end,” reported Billy, who had shot and killed, and had reloaded like lightning and shot and killed again.

“And two for Davy, and another who’s dropped yonder; and those that Jim and I got. That makes a mess,” said Hi. “Wall, reckon we’d better butcher ’fore the wolves spoil the meat. You fellows go ahead here, and Jim and I’ll fetch in the rest.”

“Davy didn’t do so bad, himself; did he?” remarked Mr. Baxter, climbing out of the wagon. “Did you aim, Davy?”

“No,” confessed Davy; “not after the first shot. My eyes were full of buffalo.”

“Mine’s the biggest, anyhow,” boasted Left-over. “If I hadn’t shot him so much he’d have got away.”

With Davy and Left-over helping the best that they could, Billy and the Reverend dressed the buffaloes that were near the wagon; and before they were done Hi and Jim came in, packing the best portions of those lying out in the wake of the herd. Even though only the best parts—the humps and rib roasts—were taken, the outfit had what looked to be more meat than they could use. But Hi and Jim were up to snuff.

“We’ll jerk this as we go,” said Hi. “Cut it into strips, fellows.”

So they cut much of the meat into strips about two inches wide and as thick as one’s finger and a foot long, and hung it on cord all around the wagon, row after row. So dry was the air and so pure out here in the great open plains that before the wagon had travelled an hour the strips already were curing hard and dark. They resembled strips of leather. That considerable dust settled on them apparently did no harm.

“Now they’ll keep forever,” declared Hi, striding along after a brief inspection. “You can chaw ’em as they are, or fry ’em; and you’ll find

’em the sweetest meat you ever stuck between your jaws. Thar’s nothing better than buffalo jerky.”

That afternoon they passed another stalled Pike’s Peak outfit—a whole family, this time, with their wagon mired down to the hubs in a boggy place that sometimes was a creek. The canvas top proclaimed: “Root Hog or Die! We’re from Ohio. Bound for the Gold Fields.”

“Started rooting a leetle early, haven’t you?” queried Hi, as the Hee-Haw Express halted to survey.

A thin, sallow woman was sitting on the ground holding a baby. Three children were playing about. A cookstove stood out, with dishes scattered around. A yoke of scrawny lame oxen grazed near.

At Hi’s good-natured hail the woman gave a weak, tired answer.

“Howdy, strangers. Yes, ’pears like we’re stuck. We’ve been here since yesterday. Can’t seem to get out.”

“Are you alone?” asked Mr. Baxter.

“No, sir. But my man he’s thar in the wagon, sick. Reckon he’s got the janders, and he isn’t any good.”

But a boy younger than Davy walked forward from the other children. He was a ragged, sharp-faced youngster, and now full of business.

“I’m boss of this outfit,” he asserted. “Say, can’t you hitch on your mules an’ give us a lift. Those oxen of ours can’t pull grass up by the roots, they’re so plumb wore out. It’s a hard trail, strangers.”

“Sure we can,” replied Hi, promptly. “Unhitch, boys. Let’s snake ’em out o’ thar.”

“Want our oxen, too?” keenly queried the boy.

“Nope, sonny. We can haul the wagon, but we can’t haul the bulls at the same time.”

At shout and crack of lash the Hee-Haw mules sturdily put their shoulders to their collars and with heave and groan the wagon rolled

out to the firm ground.

“Much obliged,” said the boy. “What do we owe you?”

“Nothing,” answered Hi.

“Strangers,” spoke a quavering voice, and the man himself poked his face out from under the hood, “how’ll you trade some of that meat for a sack of flour. I’ve a powerful hankering for fresh meat.”

He was as yellow as a sunflower, and looked pretty miserable.

“Take ten feet of it and welcome,” proffered Mr. Baxter at once. “We don’t want your flour.”

“No; we’ve got plenty flour,” added Hi.

“Thank you,” said the woman, “but we don’t travel on charity. My man’s got a turrible hankering for meat, and if you’ll trade we’ll be right glad to dicker with you. I reckon you can use the flour, can’t you?”

“Just as you say, then, ma’am,” responded Hi. “But you’re welcome to the meat.”

Billy was already slashing at a string of the jerky; down it came. Seeing this, the Ohio boy dived into the wagon and lustily dragged forth a sack of flour.

He shouldered it and staggered with it toward the Hee-Haw wagon. Billy sprang to take it, but the boy shook his head stubbornly.

“I’m man enough to tote this,” he panted.

“I reckon you are, sonny,” grinned Hi. “But you’ll lemme help you toss it into the wagon, won’t you? You’re so strong and sassy you’re liable to bust a hole through the box!”

“How far to Pike’s Peak, strangers?” asked the woman, anxiously.

“A few hundred miles, ma’am.”

“It seems a powerful long road,” she sighed. “We’ve come clear from Ohio; drove the whole way. We started last fall, an’ wintered in Missouri. That’s where this baby was born.”

“We’ll get there, ma,” encouraged the boy. “Pap’ll feel better now, an’ we’ll go a-whoopin’.”

“I hope so,” she faltered. “But they do say there isn’t any gold, anyhow.”

Davy felt sorry for her. Evidently so did the Reverend Mr. Baxter.

“What is your name, if you please?” he asked.

“Jones. Mrs. Jasper Jones. My man’s a blacksmith.”

“Well, Mrs. Jones, we understand there’s quite a town going up out at the mountains; and if we get there before you do we’ll trade this flour in for a corner lot and your husband can start in blacksmithing.”

“Will you?” she exclaimed, brightening. “Now that’s mighty kind of you.”

“I’ll take care of you, ma,” comforted the boy, quickly. “I’ll take care of you an’ pap, too, as soon as we get where there’s some work.”

“I believe you will, sonny,” spoke Jim admiringly. “You’ll make the fur fly. We’ll tell ’em you’re coming, so they’ll leave space for you.”

And Billy added as good measure:

“When you get to the diggin’s, if you don’t see me you ask for Billy Cody. I’ll fix you out.”

“Aw, crickity!” gasped the boy, staring. “Say—are you Billy Cody, the Boy Scout?”

“I’m Billy Cody, all right,” responded Billy, now somewhat confused, while Hi and Jim and Mr. Baxter laughed loudly.

“We know you. We read all about you in the paper,” proclaimed the boy, excited. “That time you fought the Injuns. Say—will you shake hands with me?”

“Aw,” stammered Billy, trying to hide behind the wagon, “forget about that, will you? I’m nobody.”

“Terrible modest all of a sudden, isn’t he!” chuckled Jim, as he and Hi and the Reverend finished harnessing the mules again.

“I killed a big buffalo! Biggest one you ever saw!” squealed Left-over. “Shot him all to pieces jest as he was running into us. Didn’t I, Billy?”

“Hooray for Left-over!” cheered Hi. “Well, catch up, boys. We’d better be moving or we’ll never get thar.” And he addressed the other outfit. “Can we do anything more for you?”

“No, thank you, strangers,” said both the woman and the man. “We can make it, now our wagon’s out. And that meat’ll taste powerful good.”

“Goodby, then,” called the Hee-Haws.

“Goodby.” And the woman added. “Don’t forget that corner lot.”

“We won’t.”

The timber lining the course of the various streams had shrunken, and the streams themselves were dwindling ever smaller. It was a barren country, this, wide and sandy and dotted with occasional thumb-like hills called buttes. Across it wound the trail, marked by dust and canvas-topped wagons.

“We must be getting near the mountains, boys,” called Hi. “That last station agent said we were only two hundred miles from Denver.”

“We ought to see them, then, pretty soon, I should think,” remarked Mr. Baxter.

“The chances are we’ll be looking for water instead,” declared Jim. “The country’s going dry on us.”

The trail had swerved in to the Smoky Hill Fork again; and the Smoky Hill Fork itself seemed about to quit. It contained only a mere trickle of water.

“You can follow the stage route on west to the Big Sandy,” informed a squad of returning Pike’s Peakers, “or you can cut over to the northward and find water there. It’s more than twenty-five miles to where the stage route strikes the Big Sandy, and there isn’t any water even then. But we hear tell there’s water on the short cut to the north, where you strike the Big Sandy higher up.”

Hi nodded thoughtfully.

“All right,” he said. “How’s the country north?”

“There’s nothing to brag on anywhere you go in this whole region, stranger. We’re bound back to the States. We’ve had enough. But if you try the short cut north watch out for the Injuns, ’Rapahoes and Cheyennes both.”

Hi nodded again.

“We will.”

Davy noted Left-over’s mouth open and his eyes begin to pop. Presently Left-over could hold in no longer.

“Lookee here,” he squealed. “Let’s quit. Let’s turn around with those other fellows and go home. I’m tired, and I don’t feel very well, and there isn’t anything at the other end anyhow.”

“If you want to quit you can join the next party bound east. We can do without you,” spoke Jim. “But I’m going on if I have to carry the mules.”

“So am I,” declared Billy; and the others, including Davy, felt the same way.

“I reckon Left-over’s afraid of the Injuns,” commented Hi.

This seemed to arouse Left-over’s wrath.

“I’m not, either,” he squealed frantically. “The Injuns had better not bother *me*. Did you see the way I downed the big buffalo? That’s what any Injuns’ll get who tackle *me*. You fellows don’t know me when I’m mad. I’m bad. I’m a regular tarrer. I’m half horse and half alligator. Those Injuns had better keep out of my way!”

“We’re mighty glad of your company, Left-over,” claimed Mr. Baxter soberly. “If I were you I’d ride the trail and hire out to emigrant parties to see them through safely.”

Left-over continued to bluster as they marched; and Billy only remarked to Davy:

“If his ‘do’ is half as big as his ‘tell’ he could lick Wild Bill, couldn’t he?”

Late that afternoon Hi pointed to the north.

“Here’s a chance for Left-over,” he called. “We’re going to have visitors!”

“Injuns!” said Billy quickly, shading his eyes and peering. They all peered—Davy, who was driving, from the wagon seat.

A band of horsemen were rapidly approaching across the level sandy plain. By their figures and the way they rode Indians they certainly were; some twenty of them. Left-over bellowed wildly.

“I see ’em!” he cried. “I see ’em! Gimme a gun! Get behind the wagon! Aren’t you going to stop? Going to let us all be scalped?”

“Quit your yawp!” bade Hi, roughly. “Drive along, Davy. Handle your guns, boys, so they’ll know we’re ready. Don’t let them think we’re afraid. I’ll tend to them at the proper time.”

Minding these instructions of Captain Hi, the Hee-Haw outfit proceeded as if intent on their own business. Left-over whimpered and showed a strong disposition to climb into the rear of the wagon, but Billy said sternly:

“None of that! You stay outside. Thought you were an Injun-fighter.”

“I am,” piped Left-over. “I was going to protect the wagon.”

“Huh!” grunted Billy.

Up on the seat, in plain sight, driving the mules, Davy felt rather alone and exposed; but he drove steadily. The mules were pricking their long ears and showing uneasiness.

“Watch your animals, Dave,” cautioned Jim. “A mules hates Injuns wuss ’n a rattlesnake.”

And Davy hung tight.

The Indians bore down at full gallop, as if to cut the wagon off. But at sight of the guns in the hands of Hi and Jim and Billy, when within

a hundred yards they reined in sharply and the leader threw up his hand, palm outward. Hi answered with similar sign. He rode forward halfway, so did the Indian; they met.

"'Rapahoes," exclaimed both Billy and Jim.

"Regular beggars," commented the Reverend, easily. "Hi'll fix them."

Hi and the Arapaho leader came riding toward the wagon, and the others in the band slowly edged closer. They were armed mainly with bows and spears, and did not look very formidable.

"Just a lot of rascals out on a thieving expedition, picking up what they can from the emigrants," announced Hi. "But of course they claim to be 'good.' The chief here'll show you his recommendations."

The chief (who was a villainous appearing old fellow, cross-eyed and marked by small-pox and wearing a dirty ragged blanket) passed from one to another of the Hee-Haw company, saying "How, how?" and shaking hands and extending a bit of dingy paper.

When the paper reached Davy he read:

> "This Indian is Old Smoke. He'll steal the tail off a mule. Watch him and pass him along.
>
> "Pike's Peaker."

The chief grinned and grunted, evidently well pleased with himself and the impression that he thought he was making.

"Soog!" he said eagerly. "Soog!"

"No sugar," answered Hi. "Drive on, Dave. Needn't stop."

But the old Indian kept pace.

"Tobac'. Give tobac'?"

"Nope," answered Hi, shaking his head. "Puckachee! Be off! Vamose!"

"Look out for those other Injuns!" suddenly warned Billy, the alert. "They're coming right in!"

“Don’t let ’em!” begged Left-over, excited. “Give him some sugar, so he’ll go away. I’ll give him some.”

“No, you won’t,” retorted Hi, quickly. “Then he’ll want something else. Here, you—” and he spoke in earnest to the chief. “Puckachee!” And Hi waved his hand and patted his yager meaningly. “Get! All of you! No soog, no tobac’, nothing. Keep close to the wagon, boys,” he warned to his party, “and show ’em we mean business. Drive the mules right along, Dave.” He shouted to the advanced Indians: “No! No!” And facing about shifted his gun as for action.

The chief had paused, uncertain; and now his followers paused. The Hee-Haw wagon, flanked by its body-guard, with the mules snorting and straining but controlled by Davy, pressed on. In a moment the chief rode back to his band, and all went cantering away.

“Lucky for them they didn’t try to make us trouble,” boasted Left-over, changing his tune but still suspiciously pale. “We’d have shown ’em!”

“Lucky for us, you mean,” growled Hi. “If once those fellows had got in amongst us and started to crowding us thar’s no knowing what mightn’t have happened. That’s the mistake lots of these emigrants make. They try to parley and give presents, thinking they’re buying the Injuns off; and fust thing they know they’re overrun and helpless and lose their whole outfit.”

“Were you scared up there, Dave?” called Billy.

“No. Were you down there?” retorted Dave.

“Not so anybody noticed it, I hope,” answered Billy.

“Well, one thing’s certain,” said Jim. “We’ve got wuss ahead of us than Injuns, I reckon. Water’s petered out.”

Before their eyes the shallow head-waters of the Smoky Hill Fork disappeared abruptly, as if soaking down through the sand of its bed. Davy checked his mules while Hi and the others surveyed before. Not a token of water showed beyond or as far as they could see.

Billy Cody had promptly trudged on in the advance; and now he shouted and waved.

“Trail forks,” he reported. “One fork keeps on, other turns off to the right.”

“We’ll follow that right fork as far as we can before dark,” quoth Hi. “How’s the water bar’l? Fill her up.”

The Reverend Mr. Baxter sprang to the river bed and with the camp spade dug vigorously. The others took pails and pans and kettles and carried water, as fast as the hole supplied it, to the big cask that, slung fast at the rear of the wagon, formed part of the trail kit.

It was slow work filling this cask through the bung-hole, but Hi kept them at it until the cask was well-nigh running over. By this time dusk was settling, and with a shrewd glance about at the landscape Captain Hi said:

“Unspan, boys. We might as well camp right hyar. But it’s mighty poor grazing for the mules, I tell you!”

XII

PERILS FOR THE HEE-HAWS

Many emigrants had camped here, evidently. The grass had been eaten off for several acres around, and Davy roamed in a circle of a quarter of a mile before he had gleaned enough buffalo chips for the supper fire.

“Better get enough for breakfast, too, Dave,” warned Mr. Baxter, the cook, with a weather-wise eye cocked at the horizon. “Hear the thunder? We’re liable to be soaked and so will the chips.”

Buffalo chips when dry were fine, quick, hot fuel; but when wet they were hopeless, like soggy paste-board. Mr. Baxter’s warning had been well founded, for the air was heavy and warmish, and from some distant point echoed the rumble of a storm.

Up to this time the journey from Leavenworth had been very comfortable as to weather, with sunny days and occasional little rains. But, according to Billy and all, some of these plains storms were regular “tail twisters” and “stem winders,” drowning even the prairie-dogs out of their holes!

“Left-over’s first on guard to-night,” directed Captain Hi. “We must keep eye and ear open for those Injuns. They may sneak up and run off our mules.”

“They’d better not try it when I’m on guard,” blustered Left-over, in his funny squeak. “You’ll lemme have your gun, won’t you, Jim?”

“Not much!” rapped Jim. “I may want that gun myself. Take one of Billy’s. Let him have your yager, Billy. What have you got in it?”

“A bullet and three buckshot. I loaded her for Injuns.”

“That’s right. Left-over can do a toler’ble lot of shooting with that load.”

Pleased, Left-over took the gun and posted himself just outside the firelight, where he could oversee camp and mules (now tethered near) and any prowling figures approaching. The night settled black and thick, with the stars faintly twinkling through a haze; but wrapped in his blanket beside Billy, Dave soon fell asleep.

He was awakened by a loud bang, and a louder howl from Left-over, who seemed to be stepping on everybody at once.

“Injuns! I’m killed! Help! Murder! Wake up! Why don’t you wake? Help! Murder! Injuns! Injuns!”

Before Davy had collected his own wits and was out from the blanket Billy had sprung up like a deer; with the one motion he was on his feet, free of the blanket, revolver in hand, ready to obey Captain Hi’s sharp voice.

“Shut up! (to Left-over, who was cavorting around like whale in a flurry). Lie low, boys! Over here, together, away from the fire. Where are they, Left-over? What’s the matter? What’d you see?”

“I’m killed,” wailed Left-over. “The whole country’s full of Injuns —’Rapahoes. I shot into ’em when they were sneaking up, and then they shot me through the head. It all happened at once. But I saved the mules. I gave my life for ’em, and you-all.” And Left-over groaned vigorously.

Half deafened by the wails of Left-over, Davy had been listening hard for Indian whoop or rustle, and peering for shadowy forms. But he heard only the breathing of his companions and the grunty sighs of the aroused mules. Not a figure, except those of the shadowy mules, just visible against the sky-line, could be descried.

“Aw, shucks!” grumbled Billy, suddenly, breaking the suspense. And standing boldly, he strode to the smouldering camp-fire and thrust a bit of paper into the live ashes. He made a plain target, but he did not seem to care, and waited for the paper to flare.

In the flare they all stared around; the mules were the first things noted—but Mr. Baxter exclaimed:

“Look at Left-over! By jiminy, he is wounded! Start that fire more or make a torch so we can see. Wait a minute, Left-over.”

Left-over certainly presented an alarming sight. His face was welling blood, which streamed down upon his chest. His eyes rolled and he groaned dismally.

As Billy made another flare, Jim, nearest to Left-over, hastily examined, with eyes and deft fingers, Left-over groaning now terribly.

“Don’t find anything—there ain’t any new hole; mostly mouth,” Jim reported. “Can’t you hold your yawp, Left-over, long enough to tell us what happened to you?”

“I saw the Injuns sneaking up and we all shot at the same time, and I killed them and they killed me,” sobbed Left-over. “If you don’t believe me go out and look.”

“I know,” quoth Billy Cody. “That gun kicked him in the face and plumb broke his nose! She was loaded to do business.”

“Huh!” grunted Left-over, venturing to sit up and feel of his face.

“If you fellows’ll watch I’ll scout around a bit and see what’s what outside,” proffered Billy. “I keep seeing something lying out yonder. Shouldn’t wonder if Left-over did kill an Injun.”

The lightning was fitful but incessant; its pallid flashes played over the landscape—momentarily revealing the drooping mules, the spots of sage, the wagon, the faces on Davy’s right and left, and (as seemed to Davy) exposing, for a brief instance, a dark mass lying farther out on the prairie.

“Well——” began Captain Hi; but he was interrupted. As if borne on the wings of a sudden cool gust from the west there came fresh blare of thunder and glare of lightning. Peal succeeded peal, flash succeeded flash, with scarce an interval. Hi’s voice rang sternly.

“Billy, you and Dave see to those mules, quick, or they’ll stampede. The rest of you pitch what stuff you can into the wagon

and stretch guy-ropes to hold her down. This is an old rip-snorter of a storm, and it's coming with its head down and tail up!"

Nobody paused to question or debate. The storm seemed right upon them. Following Billy, Dave leaped for the mules.

"Tie 'em to the wagon wheels," yelled Billy, in the pale glare tugging at a picket pin.

He and Davy hauled the mules along to the wagon, where Hi and Jim, Mr. Baxter and even the gory Left-over were hustling frantically to put things under cover and make the wagon fast with guy-ropes stretched taut over the top.

But the storm scarcely waited. The bellow of the thunder and the fierce play of the lightning increased. There was a pause, a patter, a swift gust; and rushing out of the inky night charged the rain.

Rain? Sheets of it! Blinding, drenching sheets of it, driven by gust after gust, and riven by peal after peal, glare after glare.

"Hang to the wagon, everybody!" shouted Captain Hi; and Davy, hanging hard, could see, amidst the cataract of water, his partners also hanging hard to guy-ropes and wagon-sheet corners. The mules stood drooped and huddled, their ears flat and their tails turned to the storm.

Never had there been such lightning, never such thunder, never such rain! All in a moment, as it seemed to Davy, he was soaked through and through, and the ground under him was running with water an inch deep. The wagon top bellied and slapped and jerked, and every instant was threatening to tear loose and sail away, or else lift the wagon and all with it.

"Hurrah!" yelled Billy gaily, braced and panting, as he tried to anchor his corner. Nothing daunted Billy Cody. "Now we've got water a-plenty!"

As suddenly as it had arrived the bulk of the storm departed, leaving only a drizzle, and a very wet world. The Hee-Haw party might release their grip on the wagon, and take stock. The rain had

driven through the canvas top into the bedding and other stuff, and the rest of the night bid fair to be rather uncomfortable.

“What are we going to do now?” whined Left-over.

“Do the best we can,” answered Captain Hi. “Stand up or lie down, whichever you please, till morning.”

“Aren’t you going out to look at my Injun?”

“He’ll keep. We’ve got enough to tend to right hyar.”

Mr. Baxter lighted the lantern, and they overhauled the bedding.

“Come on, Davy,” quoth Billy. “I’m going to sleep. Crawl in and we’ll shiver ourselves warm.”

Billy’s buffalo robe was spread down on a spot where the rain already had soaked into the sandy soil, and snuggled beside him, under a blanket, dressed just as he was, Dave soon found himself growing warm.

“’Twon’t hurt us any,” murmured Billy. “I’ve been wet this way many a time before. If we don’t change our clothes we won’t catch cold.”

That was fortunate, for they had no clothes to change to!

When Dave awakened, the sun was almost up; he was nearly dry, and had not been uncomfortable, after all. The Reverend Mr. Baxter was trying to start a fire with bits of wood from some of the boxes in the wagon, and to dry out a few buffalo chips. Left-over was snoring lustily, but the rest of the camp was turning out. Billy, who was sitting up, gazing about, whooped joyously.

“Look at Left-over’s Injun!” he cried, pointing. Out he sprang and hustled across the plain. The camp began to laugh—all but Davy, who stared, blinking, and Left-over, who stirred, half aroused.

At the dark spot, which was Left-over’s Indian, Billy stopped; he waved his hand and cheered, and came back, dragging the thing. As he drew near, Davy saw what the others had seen. The Indian was a big calf!

“Shot it plumb through the head!” yelped Billy. “’Rah for Left-over!”

“What is it? What’s the matter?” stammered Left-over, struggling to sit up, while he blinked, red-eyed.

“Better take his tail for your scalp, Left-over,” bade Jim. “It’s a pity we don’t need meat, but you can butcher him if you want to.”

Not for some weeks did the Hee-Haw outfit get done teasing Left-over about his “Injuns.”

“Anyway,” soothed Mr. Baxter, “you made a good shot. Nobody can deny you that.”

“Huh!” agreed Left-over, swelling importantly. “I knew it was something, and I drew bead and whaled away.”

“Purty good to draw bead in the dark,” remarked Captain Hi. “Left-over must have eyes like a cat!”

They ate a rather scant breakfast, mostly cold; and leaving the luckless calf (which must have wandered from some emigrant party) minus a few steaks, they turned northwest on the cut-off to the next water. The stage route went straight on, over a bare plateau; but a number of emigrants evidently had been turning off here on a trail of their own.

So sandy was the soil and so hot the sun that very soon the ground was as dry as before, and Billy’s boast of “plenty water” failed to make good.

About the middle of the morning they passed an emigrant train of a large party still recovering from the storm. Wagons had been capsized, tents torn up bodily, and equipage scattered far and wide. One wagon had been carried away completely.

“How far to the mountains, strangers?” queried one of the emigrants. It was the same old question. All the Pike’s Peak travellers appeared to have the one thing in mind—the mountains.

“Follow us and you’ll get thar,” replied Captain Hi. “What do you know about this cut-off?”

“Nothing at all, stranger. There looked as if somebody had gone up this way, so we came too.”

“It’s a terrible dry road, though,” sighed a woman. “Maybe if we’d have kept on west we’d have done better.”

“Well, by jiminy!” said Hi, as the Hee-Haws toiled on. “I sort of think so, myself. This trail doesn’t look good to me; not a little bit.”

“Shall we turn back?” proposed Mr. Baxter.

“I hate to turn back,” spoke Billy promptly. “I like to keep a-going.”

“Oh, we might as well go on,” added Jim. “I hate to back track, too. But there aren’t many emigrants on this trail, that’s certain.”

“The trouble is they’ll follow like sheep,” asserted the Reverend. “If this cut-off is no good somebody ought to put a sign on it.”

Hotter and hotter grew the day. The trail, which was not so large after the emigrant party had been passed, wound among blistering sand-hills, and soon the mules were plodding doggedly, with tongues out, hides lathering. They guided themselves, for the Reverend, whose turn it was to drive, had mercy on them and walked. That night at camp he uttered a sudden exclamation.

“Water’s more than half gone, boys,” he announced. “Either this keg leaks or the air drinks faster than we do.”

“We’ll have to be easy on water, then,” ordered Captain Hi. And they all went to bed thirsty.

Davy had a miserable night, and probably the rest did, too, although nobody except Left-over said anything. The mules started out stiffly. But Mr. Baxter suddenly shouted, in a queer wheeze, pointing:

“Cheer up, fellows! There’s either a cloud or a mountain—see?”

They peered. Away in the west, just touched by the first rays of the sun, peeped over the rolling desert, at the horizon edge, a vague outline that did look like the tip of a cloud.

“There’s another!” cried Billy, pointing further to the north. “If those are mountains I reckon this one is Long’s Peak; maybe that other is Pike’s Peak.”

Davy gazed constantly at the two vague, cloudlike breaks in the line of horizon and sky. As the sun rose higher they seemed to grow whiter; but they did not move. They must be mountains, then; and oh, so far away! Occasionally, as the wagon labored over a swell in the desert, Davy thought that he could descry other mountains in an irregular ridge connecting the tip in the north with the tip at the south. However, as the sun shone fiercer the whole sandy plain quivered with the heat rays and the horizon blurred. Nobody seemed to care about the mountains now; the main thought was getting through to water.

The trail was almost drifted over by sand; the Hee-Haw party appeared to be the only party travelling it. That was discouraging. The mules scarcely moved. At noon they were given a little drink out of Hi's hat, for the wooden bucket had warped and leaked like a sieve. Davy never had been so thirsty in all his life, and Left-over had to be forced back by main strength from the nearly empty cask. That night, camped in a dry watercourse, where they dug and dug without finding any moisture, they used the last of their water for coffee.

"It's make or break, to-morrow, boys," said Captain Hi. "We'll start as early as we can see, and push right through. Ought to strike water soon. The nearer we get to the mountains the better the chance for water from them."

Sunrise of the third day caught them plodding ahead, the poor mules groaning and wheezing, the wagon rolling sluggishly, and Davy, like the rest, with mouth open and tongue bone dry, in the wake. The cloud things in the horizon had remained stationary; some of them were whitish, some purplish; and mountains they certainly were!

About ten o'clock Billy cried out thickly.

"Water, fellows! Look at those mules' ears! They smell it!"

"'Pears like a creek yonder, sure," mumbled Captain Hi. "Don't be disappointed, though, if it's another mirage." For they had been fooled several times by the heat waves picturing water.

"Those mules smell water, just the same, I bet you," insisted Billy.

Far in the distance shimmered now a thin fringe of green. The mules actually increased their pace; they broke into a labored trot; and shambling heavily behind the outfit pressed on. Left-over groaned and dropped, to lie and moan dismally.

“I’m dying,” he wheezed. “I can’t move a step. Are you fellows going on and leave me?”

There was no holding the mules. As they forged along Billy exclaimed quickly:

“Wait here, Left-over. Go ahead, fellows. I’ll fetch him back a drink.”

And seizing the coffee-pot he sturdily ran and stumbled to the fore. All hastened after him, rivalling the frantic mules, but he beat.

Water it was! When they approached it did not vanish as a mirage would; and they met Billy returning with coffee-pot actually dripping as its precious contents slopped over.

Davy felt a strong impulse to halt Billy, wrest the pot from him, and drink long and deep. But of course this was only a thought. Puffing, Billy passed.

“There’s plenty water waiting you,” he announced. “I’ll bring Left-over on after he’s had his drink.”

Yes, water it was—a real stream flowing crooked and shallow in a deep bed bordered by brush and willows. The trail led to a ford. Wagon and all, the mules fairly plunged in, and burying their noses to their eyes gulped and gulped. First Jim, then in quick succession Davy and Captain Hi and Mr. Baxter (who was the last of all) imitated the mules. Whew, but that drink was a good long one! It seemed to Davy, as he sucked again and again, that he simply could not swallow fast enough.

“Some head stream or other, I reckon,” finally spoke Captain Hi. “Shouldn’t wonder if we had water now all the way in. We’re getting where the drainage from the mountains begins to cut some figger.”

Billy arrived with Left-over. They spent the rest of the day beside the welcome stream; and by morning they left about as strong as

ever.

The trail that they were following now crossed at least one stream a day, so that the water cask was kept filled. The buffalo jerky had been eaten or was not eatable; but antelope and black-tail deer were abundant. So the trail proved pleasant. Captain Hi called attention to the fact that the water was growing colder to the taste; and he said that the snow mountains must therefore be nearer. Indeed, the mountains were nearer; they lined the whole western horizon, and made a humpy, dark ridge extending from straight ahead far up into the north. A haze like to a fog veiled them much of the time, and the Hee-Haw party were always expecting a better view.

Anyway, there were the Rocky Mountains in sight; and little by little the trail was approaching them. Yet it was a long, long trail, and who would have imagined that the plains were so broad from Leavenworth to the digging!

However, one morning a surprise occurred. The trail had been threading a little divide which evidently separated one stream from another. A few pines were growing on it. They smelled good. When the mules had tugged the wagon over the last rise and were descending a splendid spectacle unfolded to the eyes of the Hee-Haws. Involuntarily they cheered—hooray! and again hooray! For right before them was the main trail once more, with the wagons of emigrants whitening it and with a stage dashing along.

Down hastened the Hee-Haws, even the mules being glad of company.

“Hooray for Cherry Creek and the diggin’s, strangers!” was the greeting, as the Hee-Haw party entered at a break in the toiling procession.

“How much further, lads?” asked Captain Hi.

“Whar?”

“To the mountains?”

“Seventy miles to the diggin’s, we hear tell. This is the head o’ Cherry Creek, hyar; and as soon as the fog lifts you’ll see what

you're looking for, I reckon."

The fog, which had cloaked the horizon since sunrise, already was thinning; and staring, the Hee-Haws waited the result.

"I see them!" cried Jim, waving his battered hat.

"Where, Jim?"

"Yonder, straight in front."

"So do I!" yelped Billy. "There's Long's Peak—that big peak up at the north end. I've seen him from the Overland Trail. Look at the snow, will you!"

"Isn't it wonderful!" breathed the Reverend Mr. Baxter, in awed tone.

And it was. Almost halting, spell-bound, they gazed. As the fog broke and melted away it exposed a mighty barrier, extending in a vast sweep from the right to the left—two hundred miles of mountains, the front range soft and purplish, the back range dazzling white with snow. The rugged plains, brushy and somewhat timbered, and lighter green where meandered Cherry Creek, reached to their very base.

"Where's Pike's Peak?" demanded Left-over.

"That lone peak at our end, stranger," informed an emigrant.

Round and bulky and snow covered, standing out by himself, like an exclamation-point completing the range, Pike's Peak seemed the biggest peak of all.

"That's not far. 'Tisn't more than ten miles!" declared Left-over. "Come on! Let's go and climb it. Get out your picks, fellows! Don't you see a kind of yellow patch? That's gold, I bet you."

"Keep cool, young man," warned the emigrant. "You try to walk it before night and you'll find out how far that peak is. More than fifty miles, I reckon."

"It looks powerful cold up yon," quavered a woman. "They do say the snow never melts off."

The trail was now much more interesting. Some of the emigrants had come out, like the Hee-Haws, over the Smoky Hill Fork Trail, and the others were from the Santa Fe Trail up the Arkansas River, to the south. A trail along the base of the mountains connected this with Smoky Hill Trail. Soon the trail by way of Republican River joined in. The triple travel on Cherry Creek Trail was now so thick that Davy again wondered where all the people were coming from.

The marvellous panorama of the Rockies remained ever in sight before. Nobody tired of gazing at it, wondering which of the peaks, besides Pike's Peak, were inlaid with gold and if a fellow could live on top of Pike's Peak or back yonder among those other peaks while getting out his fortune. Some of the emigrants (Left-over included) asserted loudly that they could see the gold shining!

However, the first sight of the Pike's Peak settlements—Denver and Auraria—began to be watched for the most eagerly. The mountains gradually drew nearer, Pike's Peak gradually fell behind until on the afternoon of the third day, down the winding, white-topped procession swept a glad cry. Whips were flourished, sun-bonnets were waved, hats were swung; men and women cheered, children shouted, dogs barked.

"The Cherry Creek diggin's! There they are! There are the gold fields and the pound a day!"

People seemed to forget the bad reports spread by the disgruntled emigrants bound back to the States. Hopes were again high for success and fortune at the end of the long, long trail.

Sure enough, several miles before, in a basin set out from the mountains a short distance, were a collection of wagons and tents and other canvases, and a number of cabins, also, jumbled together on both sides of the creek, apparently, and bounded before by a wooded river. At the edges was a fringe of little camps like those of emigrants stopping by the way.

Evening was nigh; the sun was low over the snowy range; smoke was curling from camp-fire and chimney.

“We won’t make it to-day, fellows,” spoke Captain Hi. “But we’ll pull in the first thing in the morning.”

“Goodness! Look at the people pouring in by the northern trail, too!” exclaimed Mr. Baxter.

For glinting in the last rays of the sun a long wagon train of emigrants, resembling crawling white beads, was heading in from the opposite direction.

“That’s the cut-off down from the Salt Lake Overland Trail up the Platte,” quoth Billy, promptly. “The bull trains travel that trail.”

XIII

THE CHERRY CREEK DIGGIN'S

With so many people making for Cherry Creek over several trails it seemed a pity to waste a night by camping. But when darkness settled the trail was ablaze with the camp-fires of the emigrants who, like the Hee-Haw outfit, had halted until dawn. Afar blinked the lights of the "Pike's Peak settlements"; and miles distant, north across the plain, were the bright dots betokening the camps of those emigrants entering by the Salt Lake Overland Trail.

The whole procession was early astir with the dawn; even Left-over was up as soon as anybody, eager to be digging out his pound of gold a day.

The trail down Cherry Creek was six inches deep with dust, ground to powder by the constant wheels and hoofs. In a great cloud it rose as the wagons and animals and persons ploughed through it; to the north lifted other dust lines, where the rival travel likewise pressed forward to the goal. It was an inspiring scene, almost as good as a race; but Left-over grumbled:

"I don't call this Pike's Peak," he said. "And where's Denver City? I don't see any city."

"City or not," remarked the Reverend Mr. Baxter, "it's a wonderful thing, Davy—all these people, from all over the United States, setting out overland, breaking new trails, and founding a town away out here, six hundred miles across the desert, at the foot of those snowy mountains! It's taken a lot of pluck and a lot of trust in Providence."

"Where do you calculate on stopping, boys?" queried a black-eyed, sharp-nosed man who was riding down along the column.

"I don't know," drawled Captain Hi. "What's the difference?"

“All the difference in the world. Throw in with Auraria. She’s on the mountain side of the Creek, and she’s bound to be the biggest city west of Omaha. We’ve got the buildings, the people, and the ferry across the Platte River. Remember that. Don’t let these Denver boomers fool you. Stop at Auraria and we’ll treat you right.”

And he rode on down the line talking about “Auraria.”

But he was close followed by another man—a fatty, red-faced man.

“Keep right on down the east side of the creek to Denver City,” he proclaimed. “The travelled side, the side next to the States. Buy a town lot in Denver; it’ll be a nest-egg for you while you’re at the diggin’s. Denver, Denver, Denver! Remember the east side of the creek.”

And he, also, proceeded on, chanting the praises of “Denver City.” The Reverend Mr. Baxter laughed.

Before they reached the settlement district the trail forked. A large sign, pointing to the left-hand fork, said: “AURARIA. Direct Route to the Gold Fields.” Another sign, pointing before, said: “Straight Ahead for DENVER CITY. Nearest and Best.”

“Which will it be, boys?” queried Captain Hi.

“Let’s try Denver. It’s on this side of the creek and it’s named for the governor of Kansas,” spoke Mr. Baxter.

So they continued on down to Denver City. Denver and Auraria were separated by only the almost dry channels of Cherry Creek, and both extended along it nearly to the Platte River below, into which Cherry Creek emptied. As soon as the Hee-Haw party had pitched their camp on the outskirts of Denver, they hastened about their business. Davy and Mr. Baxter paired off to wander about. Billy and Hi and Jim undertook some errands. Left-over was wild to grab shovel and pick and pan and start right in digging and washing.

Many persons, in plain sight all up and down the creek bed, were working hard panning for gold. Some of the emigrants had begun almost before they had unharnessed their teams. And yonder,

northwest, glimpses of the Platte River, flowing past both Denver and Auraria, gave glimpses also of other miners delving away.

Billy walked straight to the nearest group in the creek bed.

“How are you making it, pardner?” he asked.

“Have you fellows come for your pound a day, too?” asked the man. Even his wife was wielding a dish-pan while he shovelled.

“You bet,” assured Billy.

The woman paused, and the man laughed wearily and wiped his forehead.

“You’ll be lucky if you make fifty cents,” he said.

“Yes,” quavered the woman. “It’s awful poor picking along this creek. I expect we’re all going to starve, provisions are getting so high.”

“Where are the diggin’s, then?”

“Yonder, up in the mountains, stranger. We hear tell they’ve made a big strike there. We’re going on as soon as we can travel. But our oxen are about petered out.”

“How far’s Pike’s Peak?” demanded Left-over. “Where’s the Pike’s Peak country? Why don’t you go to Pike’s Peak?”

“That’s Pike’s Peak down south, seventy-five miles,” answered the man. “They call this the Pike’s Peak country, but it’s only a name. I reckon you’ve heard of them sliding down Pike’s Peak and scraping up the gold as they slide. Don’t you believe it, mister. The peak’s above snow line and the ground is frozen solid. See that line of wagons? They’re all heading to the new Gregory diggin’s, west in the mountains about forty miles. That’s the big strike.”

“Oh, shucks!” exclaimed Billy.

Davy felt his heart sink; this, then, was not the end of the gold-seekers’ trail, and the snowy mountains, topping the barrier of the tumbled foot-hills, looked like a hard country.

“Come, Davy,” said the Reverend Mr. Baxter. “We’ll see the sights first, anyway.”

So they left Left-over, hauling out his pick and spade and gold-pan to join the squads working along the creek; and Hi and Jim and Billy, who set forth on errands; and trudged away “to see the sights.”

“This gold craze is all right as a means of attracting the people here,” remarked the Reverend Mr. Baxter, thoughtfully. “But the most wonderful part to me is the settlement itself. There must be fifteen hundred population already in scarce a year, and emigrants are pouring in at the rate of a thousand a day, I hear. There are fifty thousand on the way, Dave. I don’t give a snap for the mines; but look, what has happened! This gold excitement is going to settle the plains. The United States has jumped at a leap from the Missouri River six or seven hundred miles to the mountains. With a city here, and cities at the other end, there’ll soon be cities in between. A whole lot of waste country is due to be made useful.”

“I don’t call this much of a city yet,” commented Davy, considerably disappointed over the end of his trip.

“Well,” said Mr. Baxter, “it’s the starter for one if the people don’t starve to death. The weak hearts will go back; the strong ones will stick; it’s only a question of holding out for a while until the land is cultivated.”

Truly, Denver was a strange collection of tents and shacks, with a few good buildings. The houses were of hewn logs, sod roofs and dirt floors, and the furniture was made mostly from slabs and planks. There were few windows; and these were filled with sacking stretched across or else had wooden shutters. As far as Davy could see, the whole town did not have a pane of glass.

However, the streets (and particularly the two main streets named Blake and Larimer) were thronged with people as thick as the crowds at the other end of the route, Leavenworth. Indians, Mexicans and whites fairly jostled elbows, and conversation in every variety of speech was heard. The whites wore costumes ranging from the broadcloth frock coat and flowing trousers of the St. Louis

and New York merchant to the flannel shirt, jeans trousers and heavy boots of the regular plainsman and miner. The Mexicans wore their broad, high-peaked hats and their serapes or gay Mexican blankets, draped from their shoulders. The Indians stalked about bare-headed, and enveloped in their blankets also. There were few women.

Several stores handling general merchandise had been opened, but according to the signs goods were expensive. One sign said: “Antelope Meat, 4 cents a lb.” Picks and spades were the cheapest; they could be bought for fifteen cents apiece, and nobody seemed to be buying at that! This was a bad sign; it showed how disgusted many of the overlanders had become when they found that they could not dig gold out by the pound where they stopped!

Right in the centre of Denver was a large village of Indians, camped in their tipis. By the hundreds they were lounging about, men, women and children, the men unclothed except for a girdle about the waist, and the children wearing nothing at all.

“Arapahoes,” pronounced Mr. Baxter. “Come on, Davy. There’s the stage. Let’s go over to the hotel.”

A large cloth sign before a long one-story log building said: “Denver House.” It was next to the Arapahoe village. People were hurrying across to this hotel, for a stage-coach, with crack of whip and cheer from passengers and driver, had halted short in front of it.

The coach, drawn by its four mules, dusty and lathered, bore the lettering: “Leavenworth & Pike’s Peak Express Co.” So this, then, was the daily Leavenworth stage. Already the street before the hotel was crowded with onlookers who had gathered to receive the coach. When Davy and Mr. Baxter arrived the travel-worn passengers were clambering out. The first was Mr. Majors himself! Davy recognized the long beard and he and Mr. Baxter pressed forward to welcome their friend.

“Why, hello, boys,” quoth Mr. Majors. “Where’d you drop from?”

“Just got in,” answered Mr. Baxter, shaking hands, as did Davy. “We came by mule and wagon with Billy Cody and two or three others.”

“How?”

“Up the Smoky.”

“Joined the gold rush, did you?”

“Yes, sir. But I’ve about decided I’d rather plant potatoes.”

“How about you, Dave?” queried Mr. Majors.

“I’d like to eat one,” asserted Davy ruefully.

“You’ve got the right idea, I guess,” approved Mr. Majors. “But I understand Horace Greeley has told the people here they ought to plant potatoes, and they laughed at him. Potatoes are a better crop than gold, in my opinion; but this country certainly doesn’t look very promising for them. How people are going to live I don’t know. It will be good for the freighting business, though. We’ll be hauling stuff in here with every team we can muster. Did you know we’ve taken over the stage line, too?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, we have. It’s run by Russell, Majors & Waddell now. Call in on me before I leave, and I’ll give you a pass to Leavenworth in case you want to go back.”

“All right. Thank you, Mr. Majors.”

“If I were you, my lad, I wouldn’t stay around here long,” continued Mr. Majors to Davy. “This place is going to be a good place, and I haven’t any doubt that lots of gold will come out of these mountains as soon as the people are experienced in finding it. But looking for gold haphazard is a poor job for a boy. I think you’ll do much better on the plains. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know; and there’s a big work to be done in helping these people live. If the freight outfits aren’t kept moving the diggings will starve. If you’ll come in to Leavenworth we’ll put you to work with the bull trains.”

“You’d better do it, Davy,” advised Mr. Baxter. And Davy soberly nodded.

“I guess I will, then.”

“I’m up at our Nebraska City office most of the time now,” said Mr. Majors. “But you’ll find Mr. Russell at Leavenworth and I’ll tell him to fix you out.” And Mr. Majors shouldered his way into the hotel.

“Whar’s the post-office, stranger?” asked a voice; and turning they faced an emigrant evidently newly arrived.

“I don’t know. We’re lost around here, ourselves,” explained Mr. Baxter.

“Pardon. I tella the way,” spoke somebody else. He was a tall, swarthy-visaged man, with heavy black moustache and black bushy eyebrows, a large meerschaum pipe in his mouth. However, he was neatly dressed, even to natty shoes. He looked like a foreigner, and his accent sounded foreign. He continued rapidly: “That beeg house w’ere you see-a the line of men.”

“Thank ’ee,” acknowledged the emigrant, after a hearty stare. And he strode off.

“And you, signors? Canna I direct you zomeplace?” inquired the foreign man, with a bow.

“We’re just looking around, is all,” informed Mr. Baxter.

“Then later. Perhappa for the hair or the whiskers; perhappa for the wash. Permitta me.” And with another bow he handed to Mr. Baxter and to Davy his card.

It read: “H. Murat. Tonsorial Artist. Shaves, Trims and Cuts. Laundry Done.”

“Do you know who he is?” piped another voice at Davy’s side, as the dark foreigner disappeared in the crowd. “He’s a count, a real Italian count.”

The speaker was a slender, fair-haired little fellow, not much older than Dave himself.

“He’s Count Murat. His father was a big man in Italy. But out here the count’s a barber and his wife takes in washing.”

“I declare!” ejaculated Mr. Baxter. “And where did you come from, son?”

“From the States. I’ve been up in the diggin’s, but I froze my feet and I’m going home.”

“Are your folks here?”

“No, sir. I ran away. But I’ve got enough and when I reach home I’m going to stay there.”

“Well, you’d better,” approved Mr. Baxter. “You’re too young to be out here alone.”

“I guess I am,” admitted the little fellow. “Life out here is fierce unless you’re used to it.”

“How are the diggin’s?” queried Davy, eagerly.

“Forty miles into the mountains—and then always a little farther,” asserted the young fellow. “If you can stick it out and don’t freeze to death or starve to death you may make a few hundred dollars—and you may not. Did you ever mine?”

“No,” said Davy, and Mr. Baxter shook his head, smiling.

“Then you’re tenderfeet like I am. That’s the trouble in there. Half the people don’t know how to find gold and the other half don’t know it when they do find it. It’s fierce, I tell you. *I’m* bound home, busted. I had to walk in, fifty miles; but I’ve earned just enough to take me through to the Missouri.”

“How?” asked Davy.

“Sweeping out for one of the gambling houses,” and with a gesture of disgust the slender youngster turned away.

Mr. Baxter watched him a moment.

“Davy,” he uttered, “that’s no boy. That’s a girl. Great Scott! What a place for a girl!”

And later they found out that Mr. Baxter had spoken the truth. They were glad to learn that the pretended boy took the next stage back to Leavenworth and reached there safely.

“Let’s try our luck at the post-office,” proposed Mr. Baxter. “I’d like to get a letter, myself.”

They threaded their way in the direction of the office. The mail had recently come in, for from the post-office window a line of men, single file, extended over a block. However, before they two took their places Billy Cody stopped them.

“I asked for your mail,” he announced. “There wasn’t any. I got a letter from ma. All she said was: ‘Dear Will. Let us know how you are. We are well. Mother.’ And I had to pay fifty cents for it down from Laramie. The new stage line carries letters for twenty-five cents. Wish ma had written more for the money. She might just as well.”

“What’s the news, Billy? What are you and the rest of the outfit going to do?”

“Hi and Jim and I are going on up to the diggin’s right away. See that line of travel?” And Billy pointed to the constant procession of wagons and of people afoot, extending from the settlement as far as the eye could reach, westward into the hills fifteen miles distant. They’re all going. Left-over’s quit and joined another outfit. He couldn’t wait. Jim and Hi are buying supplies. Did you notice the prices? Eggs are two dollars and a half a dozen. Milk fifty cents a quart. Flour ten dollars for a fifty-pound sack. Reckon beans and sowbelly will do for us. They say even game is scarce around the diggin’s.

“If you fellows don’t mind I believe I’ll stay around here for a while till people cool down a little,” said the Reverend Mr. Baxter.

“Cool down!” exclaimed Billy. “Huh! The stage driver says he passed ten thousand emigrants all heading this way!”

“Then I guess I won’t be missed,” laughed Mr. Baxter.

“How about you, Dave?” asked Billy.

Davy hesitated. What the “boy” (who was a girl) had told them rather weighed on his mind. And the same old story of “beans and sowbelly” did not sound inviting any longer.

“We saw Mr. Majors. He offered Dave a job freighting and a pass to Leavenworth,” put in Mr. Baxter.

“Take it if you want to, Dave,” said Billy, quickly. “Life in the diggin’s will be mighty tough, but I’ve got started and I’m going in. You do as you please.”

“Well,” faltered Dave, “I reckon maybe I’ll stay out a while.”

“All right,” quoth Billy. “We’ll see you before we leave. We want to pull right out, though.”

Nothing could stop Hi and Jim and Billy; and sure enough that afternoon they did pull out for the diggings forty and more miles west, among the mountains. They settled with Mr. Baxter and Dave for the two shares in the Hee-Haw outfit, and left with a cheer.

Davy felt a momentary twinge of regret that he was not going, too; but when he remembered what Mr. Majors had said about “haphazard looking” and a “bird in the hand” he decided that, after all, he had done what was best. The work of bridging the plains was a great work and very necessary if these settlements at the mountains were to live.

“Let’s go over to Auraria and see that, Dave,” invited Mr. Baxter. “Then we can find a place to stop in over night. I’m tired of bedding out on the ground.”

Cherry Creek was almost dry. Camps and cabins had been located right in the middle of it, so they easily walked across. Auraria was larger than Denver, but the buildings were not so good. They were of rough cottonwood logs, whereas the Denver logs were smoothed and many were of pine brought down from the timber in the hills. Auraria had the newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain News*, whose press and type and so forth had been hauled overland by the editor, Mr. W. N. Byers. Like Denver City, Auraria was bustling with all kinds of people.

“How are you, strangers? Don’t you want to buy a city lot and make your fortune?” invited an alert man of the two Hee-Haws.

“What’s the price?” asked Mr. Baxter.

“What’ll you give? Cash or trade? The best lots in the city. Can’t be beat.”

“Will you take a sack of flour?” demanded Mr. Baxter.

“Done!” snapped the man. “Flour’s better than money, friend. Where’s your flour?”

“Where are your lots?”

“Right yonder. I’ll show you.”

The man promptly led them on. The lots proved to be somewhere in the midst of bare, sandy ground half a mile out from the business street. They looked forlorn and lonely, and Davy did not think much of them. Neither, evidently, did Mr. Baxter. One rude cabin stood there.

“Cabin too?” queried Mr. Baxter.

“Sure.”

“How many lots?”

“Five, my friend. Five of the finest lots in this bustling metropolis for your sack of flour. And remember this is Auraria; ’tain’t measley Denver. I reckon you could buy half of Denver for your flour and then you’d be cheated.”

“All right. We’ll take you, won’t we, Davy?” responded Mr. Baxter, off-hand. “And we’ll move right in.”

“Show me your flour and we’ll go to the land office and close the deal.”

So they delivered to him the flour. At the land office the clerk asked their names.

“This is the Jones’ flour, Dave,” reminded Mr. Baxter, eyeing Davy. “We’ll have that deed made out to Jasper Jones; he’s on the way. Meanwhile we’ll occupy the cabin.”

That was certainly a good scheme—besides, as occurred to Dave, being very honest. Only it seemed rather a high price to pay for just five lots away from everywhere. The next time that Davy saw those lots they were quoted at a thousand dollars apiece!

XIV

DAVY SIGNS AS “EXTRA”

One more day in Denver and Auraria satisfied Dave. He had seen about all there was to see, and had loafed long enough. He wanted to go to work. However, many other people wanted to go to work, too. But work was scarce and money scarcer, and provisions were tremendously high. Travellers were constantly coming back from the mountains with tales of woe and with empty pockets and sore feet. The great editor, Horace Greeley, had advised people to plant crops; then he had continued on west, for California. But the people were bent on getting rich all at once by mining instead of waiting for crops. This made the situation bad, especially for a boy.

“You’d better take the stage back to-morrow, Dave,” counselled Mr. Baxter. “I’ll see you later.”

“Guess I will, then,” said Dave. “What will you do, though?” For he did not like to desert his partner.

“Oh,” laughed Mr. Baxter, “there’s a good living in hauling timber in from the foothills. Another fellow has offered to furnish the team and do the hauling if I’ll do the chopping. But that’s no life for a boy, Dave. You’ll learn more, freighting out of Leavenworth; and then you can go to school in the winter. See?”

That sounded sensible. Thus the Hee-Haw outfit had divided: Billy Cody and Hi and Jim and Left-over mining; Mr. Baxter cutting timber, and Davy freighting across the plains. Such was life in the busy West.

Davy engaged passage in the next morning’s Leavenworth & Pike’s Peak stage, east bound to the States. It had taken the Hee-Haw outfit forty days to come out; now Davy was going back in six. This was luxury. The coach held six passengers, with one on the

seat. There was a school-teacher from Vermont, a merchant from Ohio, a banker from Chicago, an army officer from Fort Leavenworth, a man and wife from Boston, and Davy. All, except Davy, had been to the “diggin’s”—and the Ohio merchant let slip the fact that he had located a good claim there where he and his partner were washing out two hundred dollars a day! So he was returning for his family.

Yes, it was an interesting company; but as best of all, the driver was Hank Bassett!

“Why, hello!” greeted Hank of Dave. “Bully for you. Get up here on the seat. I’ll take you through in style.”

“I engaged that seat,” objected the school-teacher.

“Not much,” retorted Hank. “It’ll make you seasick. I can have what I want in this seat; and the boy rides there. I can depend on him if I need a hand, and that’s very important, mister.”

“You know him, do you?”

“You’re right I know him. We’ve worked together before, haven’t we, Dave?”

Davy blushed, somewhat embarrassed by Hank’s hearty manner; but Hank had ordered, and Hank was boss, and Dave climbed to the seat beside him.

With crack of whip and cheer from the crowd gathered to watch, at a gallop out surged the four mules for the nigh seven hundred miles to the Missouri River and the States. Davy thoroughly enjoyed that trip. Hank sent his mules forward at a rattling pace; for, as he explained, he changed teams at every station, eighteen or twenty miles apart. Night and day the stage travelled, making its one hundred miles each twenty-four hours, halting only to change teams and for meals.

And night and day the Pike’s Peak pilgrims were in sight. The westward travel was even more pronounced than earlier in the year, when the Hee-Haws had joined in it. There were new signs, too, on the wagons. “Bound for the Land of Gold.” “Family Express; Milk for

Sale!" "Mind Your Own Business." "We Are Off for the Peak. Are You?" "Hooray for the Diggin's!" These and other announcements Davy read on the prairie schooners as the hurrying stage passed.

"Horace Greeley, the New York editor, wrote back east that the Pike's Peak country is O. K.," said Hank to Davy. "That's what's set the tide flowin' in earnest. People were waitin' to get his opinion. He inspected the diggin's, and he says the gold is thar—although most people would do better to take up land in Kansas and go to farmin'. If you call this trail a busy one you ought to see the Salt Lake Overland Trail up the Platte. I hear three hundred wagons a day pass Fort Kearney. This booms the freightin' business. The old man (Hank meant Mr. Majors) and his pards are puttin' on every team they can lay hands to for haulin' goods an' provisions. Why, this hyar stage line is usin' a thousand mules and fifty coaches. You're thinkin' of bull whackin', are you?"

"Mr. Majors offered me a job," answered Davy.

Hank spat over the lines.

"It's a good firm to work for," he said. "And a man's job. After you've bull whacked a while you'll be drivin' stage like I am."

That sounded attractive. To handle four mules at a gallop, dragging a coach across the plains in spite of Indians and weather, appeared quite a feat. Driving stage meant taking care of people as well as of animals.

However, holding up one's end with a freight outfit was not to be despised, these days. On arriving at Leavenworth Davy lost no time in reporting at the Russell, Majors & Waddell office. Mr. Majors was not here. He had removed his family up to Nebraska City, on the Missouri above Leavenworth, where a branch office had been established in order to relieve the crowded state of the Leavenworth shipping yards. However, if Mr. Majors was gone, here was Mr. Russell, as snappy and alert as ever, taking care of whatever came his way.

"All right, my boy," he greeted promptly. "If you want a job you're just in time. When did you get in?"

“This noon, Mr. Russell.”

“I suppose you’re ready to start back again for the mountains?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. We’ve got a train made up to leave in about an hour. Charley Martin’s wagon master. You’ll find him a fine fellow. He comes from a wealthy family in my home town, Lexington, Missouri. You’ll be an ‘extra’ at forty dollars a month, and have a mule to ride. I expect you to do as well as Billy Cody’s done. You know what your duties are, do you? You’ll act as the wagon master’s orderly, or messenger, to carry word along the line; and if necessary you’ll fill the place of any hand who’s sick. Let’s see—you signed the pledge once, didn’t you?”

“Yes, Mr. Russell.”

“Well, we changed that pledge a little to make it stronger. Mr. Majors has drawn up a new one. Read it before you sign,” and Mr. Russell reached out his tanned, freckled hand for a pad of printed forms.

Davy read: “I, ——, do hereby swear, before the Great and Living God, that during my engagement and while I am in the employ of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I will, under no circumstances, use profane language; that I will drink no intoxicating liquors; that I will not quarrel or fight with any other employe of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all my acts as to win the confidence and esteem of my employers. So help me God.”

This was an impressive promise, but it sounded just like the strict and Christian Mr. Majors. Dave had no hesitation in signing it.

“All right,” crisply approved Mr. Russell. “If you keep that pledge you’ll never be far wrong. Here’s your Bible. To every man employed in our trains we give a Bible. There’s no time or place when the Bible isn’t a help and a comfort. The more of them we get on the plains the better. Now I’m going out to the camp. You come along and I’ll start you off.”

Davy tucked the compact little leather-bound Bible into his pocket, and followed Mr. Russell's wiry active figure out of the door. Russell, Majors & Waddell certainly organized their business on somewhat unusual lines; Davy had heard the pledge and the Bible both laughed at by outsiders as being foolishness for running bull trains. But nobody was enabled to point out the harm done, and few denied that considerable good might result. At any rate, no better bull outfits crossed the plains than those of Russell, Majors & Waddell. They did what no other outfits could do; nothing stopped them.

The streets of Leavenworth were busier than ever, with emigrants, teamsters, rivermen, soldiers, and Indians—Kickapoos, Osages and Pottawattamies; with wagons, oxen, mules and horses. The company's freight trains were started from a large camp on the outskirts of town. Hither Mr. Russell, with Davy in tow, hastened.

Charley Martin was speedily found working hard—together with the assistant wagon master, who was nicknamed "Yank."

"Here's your 'extra,' Charley," announced Mr. Russell.

Charley paused and wiped his forehead. He gazed, rather puzzled.

"What name does he go by, Mr. Russell?"

"Davy Scott."

"Sometimes they call me 'Red,' too," volunteered Davy.

Charley Martin smiled; and when he smiled, Davy instantly liked him.

"Oho! This must be Billy Cody's pard on the trail and at the Cody home, I reckon. I've heard about him, but I never had the pleasure of meeting him. You must have been growing some, haven't you, Red? I thought you were a runt." And Davy fidgeted, embarrassed. During his sturdy life in the open air he had indeed been growing; he had shot up and broadened out, and had acquired a steady eye and a manner of self-reliance. "Where've you been keeping yourself lately?" continued Charley.

"I've just got back from Pike's Peak."

“Good for you. Well, if you’ve travelled with Billy Cody, and Mr. Russell recommends you, too, you’ll do.” And Charley called to his assistant: “Here’s our ‘extra,’ Yank.”

Charley was small and compact, tanned and gray-eyed, and so quick and cheery that anybody felt like calling him by his first name at once. “Yank,” the assistant wagon boss, was high-shouldered, long-legged, slouchy, and very different from Charley. His sullen face was bristly with carroty stubble, his eyes were small and close together, and his lips were thin and hard-set, leaking tobacco-juice. Him, Davy did not fancy at all; and by his glance and contemptuous grunt he evidently did not fancy Davy.

Further exchange of conversation was interrupted by the incisive voice of Mr. Russell reproving a teamster who had a perverse ox in hand.

“My man, don’t you understand there’s to be no cursing while you’re working for this company?”

“I’m not cursing,” retorted the man, with a dreadful oath.

“But you’re cursing right this minute!” asserted Mr. Russell, sharply.

“I’m not, either,” answered the man, with another oath.

“Why, you curse every time you open your mouth,” asserted Mr. Russell, red with anger.

“I don’t,” insisted the man, as before.

That was too much for Mr. Russell. As if not knowing quite what to do with such an ignoramus as this he walked off, scratching his head, and left the puzzled teamster scratching his.

“Well, Red, get busy if you’re to travel with this outfit,” bade Charley to Davy; and proceeded to give orders right and left.

The train was made up and almost ready to start. The last covers were being drawn taut, and the last wagon, which had been delayed to load in town, was approaching.

“All set?” shouted Charley to the teamster who, standing beside the rear pair of his team, seemed to have been appointed as the leader.

The teamster nodded.

“All set.”

“String out,” ordered Charley, and the word was carried along: “String out, boys! Fall in!”

The lead teamster flung his lash; it flipped forward and cracked like a pistol-shot over the backs of his twelve oxen.

“Spot! Dandy! Yip! Yip with you!”

The twelve oxen lunged all together as a well-trained team; and creaking, the huge wagon rolled ahead.

“Haw! Whoa—haw! Hep! Hep!”

To the shouts, and the volley of whip-snappers, the grunts of the oxen, creakings of the wagons and yokes, and rattle of the ox-chains, the train uncoiled from the mass that it had formed and lengthened out into a long line. Led by that first teamster whose “bulls,” sleek-coated, evidently were his pride, the white-topped bull train stretched out for the farther West.

Charley, the wagon master, rode well up with the leading team, and Davy, his assistant, as his aide or orderly, rode at his elbow ready for orders. Yank, assistant wagon master, was down the line. At the rear, behind the few loose cattle taken along for use in case of accidents, rode on a mule the “cavvy” herder—a young Eastern chap who was Mr. Waddell’s nephew and wanted to learn plains life. “Cavvy” of course was the short for “cavvy-yard,” and “cavvy-yard” was the slang for “caballada,” Spanish of “horse-herd.”

There were twenty-six wagons in the train: twenty-five loaded with freight and one mess-wagon carrying the supplies. They were enormous wagons, some of them seventeen feet long, the broad boxes five or six feet deep, the great wheels wide tired; and over all a flaring hood of canvas labelled “Osnaburg” (the trademark of the famous mills which furnished most of the duck and sheeting used on

the plains), stretched upon bows, nailed fast at the edges to the wagon-box, but at either end puckered tight by draw ropes, leaving an oblong hole. As Davy knew, the wheels, axles and other running gear were the very best of wood. Even the ends of the axles, on which fitted the wheels, were wood. The wheels were held on by an iron linch-pin thrust through the axle outside the hub. These wooden axles on the sandy, dusty plains required much greasing, and from the rear axle of each wagon hung a pot of tar for greasing. On the reach-pole, which was the pole projecting from underneath the box, out behind the wagon, was slung a ten-gallon keg of water.

Each wagon was drawn by twelve oxen, yoked together in six pairs. This was the regular fashion; twenty-five freight wagons to a train, and six yoke of bulls to a wagon. There were thirty-one men in the outfit: a teamster for each of the twenty-six wagons, the wagon master and the assistant wagon master, Davy the “extra” another “extra” (who was a regular teamster), and the cavvy herder. The teamsters trudged beside their teams; the only persons who rode were Charley and Yank and Davy and the cavvy herder, on their mules.

The freight train was called a “bull train”; the wagons were “bull wagons”; the oxen were “bull teams”; the teamsters were “bull whackers”; the wagon master was the “bull wagon boss”; and the whole array was a “bull outfit.”

Stretched out in a line a quarter of a mile long, the train made a handsome sight to Davy, proudly looking back from his post at the flank of Charley’s mule. The oxen, fresh for the start, with heads low and necks fitted into great wooden yoke and bow, pulled stanchly, at a dignified, steady plod, keeping the heavy ox-chains tight. The majority of the “bulls” were spotted white and red or black; there were a number of roans and reds and a few black. The head team were black, except the pair next to the wagon, which were red. Several had been dehorned because they were fighters.

The teamsters strode sturdily, cracking their whips, shouting to their teams and to one another, and occasionally singing. One and all wore neither coat nor vest, but heavy flannel shirt of red or blue,

and a silk or cotton handkerchief about the neck. Their shirts were tucked into coarse trousers, and the trousers into high, stout cowhide boots. On their heads were the regular broad-brimmed, flat-crowned felt hats that plains travellers liked best. About the waists of the most of the men were strapped one or two big Colt's revolvers, and through the belt was thrust a butcher-knife. They all had a gun somewhere, either belted on or else as a yager or a rifle stowed handily in the wagon. And every teamster carried, trailing or coiled, his long-lashed whip.

The train was, as Charley remarked roundly to Dave, "a crack outfit."

"We've got some of the top-notcher teams and whackers of the whole Russell, Majors & Waddell concern," he said. "There's not a better bull-whip slinger or a better six yoke of bulls on the trail than right here with this lead wagon. Of course, I suppose we've some crooked sticks, like every train has; but they've got to behave themselves while I'm boss."

The train was bound for Denver by the regular Overland Trail up the Platte River, through central Nebraska. The Government road from Leavenworth, to strike the main trail, was that travelled road which crossed the Salt Creek Valley; Davy seized the chance to dart aside for a moment and say "how-de-do" to Mother Cody and the girls. He gave them what word he could of Billy, but they gave him none, for they had not had time to hear from Billy since he had reached the diggings.

The bull train toiled on over the hill and out of the valley. Now it was fairly launched upon its day-by-day journey of 700 miles. It did not travel alone. The trail before and behind was alive with other outfits, chiefly emigrants, likewise bound for the "Peak," and Charley asserted that when the main trail was entered, at Fort Kearney, where the travel from Omaha and St. Joe and Nebraska City joined with the travel from Leavenworth, there'd scarcely be room to camp!

"How long will we be on the road, do you think?" asked Dave.

“Leavenworth to Denver? About fifty days if we have reasonable luck. The trail’s so crowded and dusty and fodder’s so scarce I don’t reckon we’ll average more than twelve miles a day. We’re hauling seventy hundred pounds in some of those wagons. But I have averaged fifteen miles a day; and travelling empty a smart bull train headed for home can make twenty.”

It now was past midsummer; it would be fall when the train reached the mountains, and winter before it got home again.

XV

FREIGHTING ACROSS THE PLAINS

“Do you know,” drawled Charley Martin, lazily, after supper this evening, “there’s a heap of money wrapped up in one of these bull outfits?”

They had made camp at sunset—and the sight had been an inspiring one. On order from Charley, the lead wagon had turned from the trail and halted; the second wagon had pulled up opposite and also halted; the third wagon had halted behind the first, a little outside of it, with tongue pointing out and the fore wheels about on a line with the other wagon’s rear wheels. The fourth wagon had halted in similar position behind the second wagon. And so forth. Each wagon widened the circle until it was time for them to begin to edge the other way and narrow the circle. At the last the circle was complete, save for an opening at either end. When the ox-chains had been linked from wagon-wheel to next wagon-wheel then the bull corral, as it was called, was finished. Or, no; after the bulls had been unyoked and driven to water and pasture each wagon tongue was hung off the ground, slung in the draw ropes of the front end of the hood. This weight kept the canvas hood pulled taut in case of storm.

It took considerable skill in driving to swing the long bull teams and land the wagons just right to form the corral. Yes, and the animals needed to be well trained, too. By the way that all went to work this wagon outfit knew their business.

The corral was useful for yoking the bulls and for standing off Indians. No Indians dared to charge a wagon corral when the men inside it had guns and ammunition.

The bulls were put out to pasture in charge of two teamsters selected as herders. The men had been divided into four messes. Each mess chose a cook and their water carrier and fuel gatherers and guards—when guard was needed. Davy was in Captain Charley's mess, which consisted of Charley and Yank, Davy, the cavvy herder, the lead teamster, whose name was Joel Badger, and the extra teamster, Henry Renick, who did the cooking. This was the smallest mess.

Each mess had its fire, about which the men lounged after eating, to smoke their pipes and joke and tell stories.

"Yes, siree; there's a lot of money wrapped up in a bull outfit," quoth Wagon Boss Charley. "Take this train here. The most of those wagons are 'Murphies' (by which he meant wagons manufactured by J. Murphy, of St. Louis), or else the Conestoga pattern built down at Westport (and by Westport was meant Kansas City). Only the best of stuff goes into those wagons. Hickory, generally—though osage orange is said to be better, for it won't warp. But second growth hickory and sound white oak answer the purpose if they're so well seasoned that they won't shrink or warp. This dry air out on these plains plays the dickens with wheels; it saps them dry and makes them so they want to fall to pieces. Well, I reckon you all know this better than I do. But as I was going to say, one of these wagons figures easily three hundred dollars, including bows and canvas. Then, bulls have been seventy-five dollars a yoke, but they're rising to double that. Taking the six yoke at five hundred dollars, and adding the yokes and bows and chains and other gear, you'll have nigh to a thousand dollars in each wagon outfit. With twenty-five and twenty-six wagons making a train there's twenty-five thousand dollars in outfit alone. And Russell, Majors & Waddell have bull trains like this every five or six miles clear across from the Missouri River to Salt Lake!"

"Not to speak of the wages of the men and the cost of the supplies," added Joel Badger.

"Yes, sir; not to mention the thirty or more men with every train at a dollar a day up; and the beans and flour and sowbelly and coffee

they use."

"Just the same," observed Joel, "I hear that in Fifty-six, before Waddell joined, Majors & Russell cleaned up about seventy thousand dollars with three hundred wagons at work."

Charley nodded.

"You can sum up for yourself. We're hauling flour at nine cents a pound, meat at fifteen cents, furniture at thirty cents, hardware at ten cents; and my waybill shows we're loaded with one hundred and sixty-three thousand pounds of freight, averaging, I reckon, at least fifteen cents."

"Which totals up between twenty-five and twenty-six thousand dollars, as I make it," proffered Joel.

"Of course, the outfits don't earn that both ways," reminded Henry Renick, scouring a skillet. "They travel back empty."

"Well, twenty-five thousand dollars for the round trip to the mountains isn't so bad," said Charley.

"No," grunted Yank, the assistant wagon boss. "Russell, Majors & Waddell are makin' their profits, all right. They can sit at home an' take things easy. But the trail's a hard life for the rest of us."

"Don't you believe they take it easy," retorted Charley. "Did you ever hear of Alex Majors taking it easy? And look at Billy Russell, with all the Leavenworth freighting on his shoulders. Besides, they know that one big blizzard or one Indian war would wipe them out in spite of their hustle. No; they've got the worry; we've got the picnic."

"'Twould serve 'em right if they did get wiped out once in a while," growled Yank, who evidently was as narrow-minded as his eyes indicated. "That psalm-singin' old whiskers has too many notions. No swearin', no drinkin' no bull skinnin', no fightin', every man read the Bible an' lay up on Sunday! An outfit can't do freightin' on these plains an' follow any such rules as those."

"See here," bade Charley, sternly. He was a gritty little chap. "You're new amongst us, my man, and I'll warn you that when you speak to us of Mr. Majors or Mr. Russell or Mr. Waddell either, you

want to do it civilly. They may have their peculiar notions of how to run a bull outfit, but I notice they've made good already with about twenty million pounds of Government freight, and that's a pretty big contract. They're a firm whose word is equal to a United States banknote; and there's not a man who ever worked for them that won't stick up for Russell, Majors & Waddell. A kinder man than Mr. Majors never lived; and if he tries to spread a little Christianity along the trail all the more credit to him, and all the better for the rest of us. We need some of that out here. The fact is a Russell, Majors & Waddell bull train is the best on the trail, besides being decent."

"Well," rapped Yank, "as long as I do the work I'm hired to do I'll allow no man to tell me how to act. When I signed that pledge for the whiskers outfit I didn't mean to keep it an' I sha'n't if I don't choose."

He stalked off; they gazed after—Charley with a keen glint in his gray eyes.

"There's a man" spoke Henry the mess cook, "who'll take it out on animals when he gets mad. He's just mean enough."

"He'll not take it out on my team," remarked Joel, quietly. "I don't whip my bulls."

"No, nor on mine," asserted Henry.

"Anybody who thinks he has to beat bulls to drive them doesn't know how to drive," added Charley.

That night they all slept on the ground under blankets and quilts and buffalo robes; many of the men slept beneath their wagons. The neck-yokes of the oxen, with an overcoat folded into the hollow of the curve in them, made comfortable pillows. At least so Davy found his when, to be a veteran bull whacker, he borrowed a yoke and tried. Two men at a time night-herded the cattle. Davy, being an "extra," did not go on herd yet.

The mess cooks were up at dawn preparing breakfast; and speedily the collection of little camps was astir. The men called back and forth, washed at the nearby creek, brought water in buckets, and what fuel they found, and were ready for breakfast when breakfast was ready for them. The company, Davy learned, furnished

everything, even to the gunny sacking in which buffalo chips and bull chips were gathered; everything except the men's revolvers. These the men owned.

By the time that the breakfasts were over the cattle had been driven, with shouts and crack of whip, into the wagon corral, where under a dust cloud they stood grunting and jostling. Yank posted himself at one gap of the corral Charley at the other.

"Catch up! Catch up, boys!" called Charley, the wagon boss; the cry was repeated, and the men sprang to their yokes. Every man with his yoke on his shoulder, a yoke pin in his hand, another in his mouth, and an ox-bow slung on his arm, the gang poured into the corral. It was an interesting sight, and a number of emigrants who had camped near gathered to witness.

There was a rivalry among the men as to which should yoke up first. Davy wondered how they found their bulls so readily; but in rapid succession every man, working hard, had yoke and bows on a pair of his team, and led them forth to his wagon. First the yoke was laid over the neck of a bull, the bow was slipped under and the pins thrust in to fasten bow to yoke; then the other bull was yoked; and this done, dragging the chains they were led out in a hurry. This pair, Davy saw, were the wheel team—the team next to the wagon. They supported the wagon pole, which hung in a ring riveted to the centre of the yoke. As soon as the wheel teams were hitched to the wagon the men hastened to yoke and lead out the lead teams, which were the teams at the other end of the six. Then the space was filled in by the four other teams, all the chains were hooked, the men straightened out their six yoke, and the train was ready to move.

It all had been done, as Davy thought, very quickly; but Joel Badger, whom Davy liked exceedingly, thought differently.

"We make rather a botch of it at first," said Joel, as beside his fine team he stood, whip in hand, waiting for the word to start. "Some of the bulls are sure to be green or ornery, and not used to their drivers or each other. After they have pulled together for a time all the bulls in each team will sorter flock in a bunch, in the corral, and a fellow

won’t have to hunt through the herd. You’ll see some fast work before you get to the end of the trail.”

“Aren’t the mules as good as bulls?” queried Davy.

“No. They used to have mules and mule skinners instead of bull whackers down on the Santa Fe Trail, and I reckon they’ve used ’em on the Overland Trail, too. Bulls are better all ’round. They can walk as fast as a mule if they’re pushed; they can live on grazing that a mule can’t; and they’re not so liable to be stampeded. If Injuns run off any cattle we can overtake ’em by mule or horse and fetch ’em back. No, for freight hauling the bulls are the best. Those used down on the southern trails are Texas cattle largely; small-bodied kind, with flaring big horns. These we use in the north, on the Overland Trail, are some Durhams, some Herefords, and so on. I reckon I’ve got about the best team in the outfit; they’re black Galloways, with a yoke of red Devons.”

“Line out, men! Hep!” called Wagon Boss Charley.

Joel launched his whip with a tremendous crack above the backs of his team.

“Haw, Buck! Muley! Spot! Yip! Yip!”

“Haw! Whoa—gee! Yip! Yip! Hep!” The air was full of dust and shouts and cracking of whips; and one after another out for the trail rolled the huge wagons, until the circle of the corral had straightened into the day’s line.

The teamsters walked at the left side of their teams until, when the wind began to blow the dust into their faces, they changed about to the clear side. They sang, they joked, occasionally they cracked their long whips, and now and then one perched sideways on the wagon-pole behind the wheel yoke, and swinging his legs rode a short distance. But nobody entered a wagon; the men either walked or sat on the pole for a brief rest.

Charley, the wagon boss, kept position near the head of the column; Yank, the assistant wagon boss, usually was found at the rear. Davy sometimes was sent back with word from Charley; and once he was dispatched five miles ahead to take a message to

another wagon train. He enjoyed these gallops over the prairie on official business, and he enjoyed riding with Charley.

“I suppose you know the make-up of a team,” proffered Charley, who seemed disposed to teach Dave as much as he could. “The first yoke next to the wagon are the wheel yoke; sometimes we call them the pole yoke. The other yokes are the swing yokes, until you come to the leaders, and these are the lead yoke. In a mule team the middle or swing spans are the pointers. Fact is, a four-span mule team is divided into wheelers, swing team, pointers and lead team. You didn’t time us this morning, did you?”

“No, sir,” confessed Davy.

“I hear Mr. Majors timed his outfit once, when it was in good trim; and it was sixteen minutes from the moment the men grabbed their yokes until the teams were hitched and the train was ready to start. That’s pretty fair for six yoke of bulls. I don’t believe we can beat it, but we’re going to try after a bit.”

“This noon I’ll show you how to pop a whip,” called Joel to Dave.

The men used their whips chiefly for the noise they made. They drove with the whips; the long lash flew out over the backs of the six yoke and seemed to crack wherever the wielder wished it to crack. Sometimes it barely flicked the back of some ox who required a little urging, but it never landed hard. Those bull whips were like living things, and in the hands of Joel and his rivals were as accurate as a rifle. The most of the men carried their whips with the lash trailing over their shoulder ready to be jerked forward like a cowboy’s rope. Dave felt a burning ambition to “pop” a whip. It must be quite an art.

The trail continued to be lined with emigrants, all pushing west, the vast majority for the “Pike’s Peak diggin’s,” but a few for California by way of the Overland Trail to Fort Laramie, and on over the South Pass to Salt Lake and the farthest West. The road was littered with cast-off stuff—so much of it that nobody seemed to think it worth picking up again.

“Great times for the Indians,” quoth Charley. “But they don’t savvy stoves and furniture yet. What they like most is the hoop iron off of

the baled hay that the Government sends out to the posts. That hoop iron is fine for arrow points; many a poor fellow crossing the plains is killed with Government hoop-iron."

"Will we meet many Indians, do you think?" asked Davy.

Charley shook his head.

"We may meet a few gangs of beggars; but the trail is too thick just now for much trouble. The Indians haven't got roused yet and started in on the war-path. But they will, later. I reckon if you get off the trail a ways you'll meet with plenty trouble, though. On the trail there are so many outfits that they can help each other, you see. The Indians are learning to shy off from bull outfits. We're ready for them any time, and it costs them too many scalps. But when these plains begin to be settled with ranches then look out for the Indians."

That noon the train halted on the far side of a creek. According to Joel, trains always tried to cross a creek before camping, in case a sudden storm might come and hold the train back by swelling the ford. They corralled, this noon, by a new evolution. One-half the train, in regular order, formed a half of the circle; the other half then formed the second half of the circle. This was called corralling with the right and left wings.

While dinner was being cooked and the bulls were herded off to water and graze, the men lounged in the shade of their wagons. Dinner was the same as supper and breakfast: fat salt pork or "sowbelly," which came to the plate in slabs six or eight inches thick; hot bread baked in the kettle-like Dutch ovens; beans from the supply baked in the ashes the night before; and black coffee with sugar. That was the regulation until the buffalo and antelope country was reached. The last of the sugar was used, too; after this camp, all the way to Denver the coffee would be sugarless. But that was only ordinary. Nobody objected to the menu; appetites were splendid.

"Here," spoke Joel, after dinner, rising, to Dave. "I said I'd show you how to pop a whip, didn't I?"

"Joel can do it, all right," approved Charley; and several other men nodded, agreeing with him.

And Bull Whacker Joel could. A heavy thing was that whip; the lash, of braided buffalo hide, was eighteen feet long and thick like a snake in the middle. It had a cracker of buck-skin, six inches long, split at the end; and a hickory stock eighteen inches long. Joel said it cost eighteen dollars in Leavenworth. Flicking it forward, from where it trailed on the ground, he landed the tip wherever he wished. With the cracker he picked up small objects at the full extent of the lash; he snipped the tips from the sage and cut blossoms; and how he "popped"!

"He's a boss bull-whip slinger," laughed Charley, approvingly. "You'll never see a better one to pick flies off the lead team."

"I've seen others," uttered Yank, who somehow appeared to have a grudge against the train. "These fancy tricks will do for show, but give me the man who can spot a bull twenty feet off an' take a piece of hide out with the cracker. I don't want no fancy fly-killer in my train. Bull whips are made for business."

"You don't want bull whackers; you want butchers," retorted Joel, contemptuously. "Here, Dave, try your luck. Give him room, boys."

Dave tried, but the long lash on the short handle proved a queer thing to handle. It persisted in flying crooked or falling short, and several times he almost hanged himself or narrowly escaped losing an ear. However, before he surrendered the whip to Joel he had got the knack of popping it; that was something.

"Hurray!" encouraged Joel. "We'll make a bull whacker of you before the end of this trip. You'll be able to pop a whip with the best of us."

Davy scarcely expected this skill; but he was resolved to do so well that he could show Billy Cody.

XVI

YANK RAISES TROUBLE

The bull train plodded on and on, day by day, across the rolling prairies, whose soil, black, made blackish dust. One day was much like another. The principal excitement was the passing of the stages. The Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company had changed from the Smoky Hill route to Denver, and were running on the famous Platte trail now: by the Government road from Leavenworth to the Platte at Fort Kearney, thence up the Platte and the South Platte—the same road that the bull train was taking.

Regularly once a day the stage from the east and the stage from the west passed the train, which, like everything else, drew aside at the sign of the well-known dust ahead or behind, and with wave of whip and shout of voice greeted the flight of the four mules and the heavy coach. At gallop or brisk trot the stage swept by—the driver scarcely deigning a glance at bull whackers—and disappeared in its own cloud.

For the bull train there were two halts each day: at noon and at evening, when the wagons were corralled, usually by the right and left wing, the oxen unyoked, and camp made for rest and meals. Then, about one o'clock and about six in the morning, the march was resumed. The men walked beside their wheel cattle and by stepping out a little and "throwing" the whip to the full extent of lash, stock and arm, they could flick the backs of their lead cattle.

However, they rarely needed to use the whip as a punishment. The whole train maintained the pace set by Joel's lead team and followed that. Each team kept close behind the wagon in front of them, so that the lead yoke's noses almost touched the rear end. It was a close formation, preserved by the bulls themselves without urging. The teamsters really had little to do while on the level trail.

But when the trail was very soft, or creeks or gullies had to be crossed, then there was work for all. Sometimes the teams were doubled, until ten or twelve yoke of bulls were stretched as one team, hauling the heavy wagons across in turn.

It was a great sight—the long line of panting, puffing oxen, with nostrils wide and eyes bulging and muscles of neck and back knotted, tugging all together, while the whips cracked and the men shouted, and slowly the huge white-topped wagon, swaying and creaking, and weighing, with its load, five tons or more, rolled onward out of difficulty.

At such times Davy felt like giving the sweaty bulls a cheer.

In the morning early, before the sun blazed and the dust and wind gathered, the plains were wonderfully peaceful, and in the clear air the flowers seemed many and the antelope and rabbits and prairie dogs more lively. In the evening the men joked and told stories and sang songs around their camp-fire ashes. The favorite songs appeared to be one called “Days of Forty-nine,” another called “Betsy From Pike,” and another called “Joe Bowers.” This was a very long song, especially when the men made up verses to fit it. Charley said that anybody could begin it at Leavenworth and end it at the mountains. But the song that Davy liked the best was sung by “Sailor Bill,” one of the bull whackers. It was “The Bay of Biscay, O!” and in a deep bass voice Bill sang it finely, because he had been a sailor:

Loud roared the dreadful thunder,
The rain a deluge show’rs;
The clouds were rent asunder
By lightning’s vivid pow’rs.
The night both drear and dark
Our poor devoted bark,
Till next day
There she lay,
In the Bay of Biscay O!

It was a strange song to sing out here in the midst of the dry plains; but with Bill booming and his comrades joining in the chorus it

sounded particularly good.

The trail was divided off by various names, as city blocks are divided off by streets. Most of the men could call the route by heart. There was Salt Creek and Grasshopper Creek and Walnut Creek and Elm Creek and the Big Blue, and the Big and Little Sandy, and Ash Point and the Little Blue and Thirty-two Mile Creek and Sand Hill Pond and the Platte River and then Fort Kearney, where, 294 miles from Leavenworth, the main Overland Trail to Denver and Salt Lake was struck.

On the Little Blue, before reaching Fort Kearney, the train had its first accident—and a peculiar accident that was. Davy first learned of it when, as he came riding back from an errand for Charley to another train behind, he saw a wagon at the middle of his train pull short and heard a shout and saw teamsters, their teams also halted, go running to the place.

“What’s the matter? Rattlers?” This was the first thought—that the teamster had been bitten by a rattlesnake.

“No. Somebody run over!”

The rear half of the train had stopped, of course; the fore half, after pulling on a little way, also had stopped. Charley came galloping back, Yank galloped forward, and so did Davy. The men ahead had gathered in a group and were carrying something out from under the wagons. It was Sailor Bill, poor fellow. He had been riding sitting on the pole of his wagon behind his wheel yoke, and he must have dozed, for he had fallen off and the wheels of his wagon had passed over him.

“My old lead bulls snorted and jumped like as if they’d stepped on a rattler,” was explaining the teamster who had shouted and halted his team. “I thought it *was* a rattler, of course; but when I looked I saw *him*! Right under my second swing team’s hoofs! But he was done breathing before ever we got to him. I’m sartin of that. His own wagon did for him; and mighty quick.”

“Yes,” they all nodded soberly, “poor Bill like as not never knew what was happening to him.”

“Anybody know who his folks are or where?” demanded Charley.

Heads were shaken.

“Never heard him say. He ran away to sea when he was a kid and never went home again, I reckon.”

“Well,” uttered Charley, “we’ll do the best we can.”

It was a solemn company which with bared heads stood about the spot where they laid Sailor Bill. A deep hole was dug beside the trail, and what was left of Sailor Bill, wrapped in a blanket, was lowered into it. Charley read a chapter from the Bible, the hole was filled, and the wagons made a little detour to drive across the spot and pack the soil so that the coyotes would not be tempted to dig there.

“We’ll certainly miss Bill and his ‘Bay of Biscay, O!’” said the men; and they did.

Henry Renick was appointed by Charley to Sailor Bill’s wagon and team, and the train rolled on.

Fort Kearney was four days, or fifty miles, ahead. On the fourth day a great dust, crossing the Leavenworth trail, made a cloud against the horizon; and Charley, pointing, remarked to Davy: “There’s the Platte trail. We’ll be in Kearney to-night.”

Fort Kearney was located on the south bank of the Platte River, at the head of a large island thirty miles long, which was called Grand Island. The military reservation extended on both sides of the river. The fort was not nearly so pleasant or so well built as Fort Leavenworth. The bluffs and the country around were bare and gray, and the buildings were old frame buildings, rather tumble-down. The only timber was on Grand Island, which made a green spot in the landscape.

Fort Kearney was a division point on the Overland Trail for Russell, Majors & Waddell. Charley reported to the company agent here, and the train laid up for a day to rest and restock with what provisions were needed. The meat was running short, for buffalo had been scarce all the way from Leavenworth.

At Fort Kearney the Leavenworth trail joined the main trail that came in from Omaha and Nebraska City. That trail crossed the Platte just above Fort Kearney, and there met the Leavenworth trail; and as one they proceeded west up the south bank of the Platte.

People at Fort Kearney claimed that on some days 500 wagons passed, headed either west or east. Joel Badger started in to count the number of teams in sight throughout an hour, but quit tired. And truly, the scene at old Fort Kearney was a stirring one: the long lines of white-topped wagons slowly toiling in from the east and the southeast, and, uniting above the fort, toiling on out, under their dust cloud, up the river course into the west.

Charley did not delay here longer than was absolutely necessary, and Davy, as well as others in the train, was glad to be away on the trail again. Yank, the assistant wagon boss, and Charley, his chief, almost had a fight, despite the pledge that they had taken, for Yank had begun drinking in the groggeries of vicious Dobytown on the edge of the post and was uglier than usual.

“You hear what I say,” spoke up Charley loud enough for everybody else to hear, too. “Any more of this and you’re discharged without pay. Those are company orders and you knew it when you signed the roll.”

“The company that discharges me without pay I’ve earned will wish it hadn’t,” snarled Yank.

“I’ll take the responsibility,” retorted Charley, angrily. “If you don’t obey company rules you’re discharged; see? And if I can’t enforce those rules I’ll discharge myself.”

Yank said “Bah!” and swaggered off; but he stayed away from Dobytown.

Fort Kearney seemed to mark a dividing point of the country as well as of the great trail. The country from Leavenworth up through Kansas had been prairie-like, with many wooded streams and considerable green meadows. But here at the Platte the greenness dwindled, and the trail wound along amidst sand and clay which grew chiefly sage brush and buffalo grass.

The Platte was a shallow, shifty stream, full of quicksands, so that drivers must be very careful in crossing. Charley told of a time when he saw a whole freight wagon, load and all, sink and disappear in what looked to be hard sand under only two inches of water! The trees in sight were for the most part on the islands in the river, for all timber within easy reach along the trail had long ago been cut and burned by the emigrants. Even buffalo chips were very scarce, so that Charley took pains to camp on the sites of previous camps, where cattle had left fuel similar to buffalo chips, although not so good.

The buffalo chips burned slowly and held the fire a long time, making splendid coals. The men seemed to think that this was because they had been lying out for years, maybe, and were well baked; whereas the cow chips and the bull chips were newer.

The Platte was frequently bordered by high clay bluffs; and where the road climbed or descended the scene at night was very pretty, with all the camp-fires of the emigrants and other bull trains sparkling high and low. The bluffs also were good coverts for Indians; and Charley ordered that each mess have a man on guard all night. Fort Kearney was considered the jumping-off place for the Indian country and the buffalo country. Beyond, the country was, as Charley said, “wide open.”

“To-morrow we’ll cross Plum Creek,” quoth Joel to Davy on the second day out from Kearney. “We ought to see buffalo at Plum Creek; ’most always do.”

Plum Creek was 330 miles from Leavenworth and thirty-six out of Fort Kearney. As they approached it, Charley and others uttered a glad cry, for buffalo were in sight by the hundreds. They were grazing on the hills and flats north of the river. Some emigrants already were among them, chasing them hither and thither; so Captain Charley ordered Andy Johnson and another teamster called “Kentuck” (because he was from Kentucky) to take Davy’s and Yank’s mules and go with him after meat.

That was as quickly done as said. Away the three spurred through the shallow water and on.

“We’ll have short ribs and roast hump to-night, boys,” shouted back Charley. He and Andy and Kentuck were good hunters.

This left Yank in charge of the train. He had not been pleasant since that scene at Kearney, when he and Charley had the row; just now he was more irritable and mean, because he had to walk. He grumbled and snarled, and said a number of unkind things about Charley which Dave knew were not true.

“Wants to take the huntin’ himself, that feller does,” grumbled Yank, “an’ leaves us other fellers to hoof it. Who ever heard of an assistant wagon boss havin’ to walk? I didn’t hire out to walk, you bet.” And he yelped out to Joel: “Hurry on your bulls there, you lead team man. Give ’em the gad or you’ll get stuck.”

For the head of the train had reached a sandy hollow, and Joel’s team were tugging through it. The sand rolled in a stream from the tires and from half way up the spokes; but the twelve bulls—the ten blacks, and the two burly reds forming the pole yoke—were pulling together nobly.

“They don’t need it,” returned Joel, shortly. “They’re doing well. Let ’em alone.”

“You’ve held the lead so long and done as you please that you’ve got sassy,” sneered Yank. “You need a new boss, an’ now you’ve got him, see? I tell you to hustle those fat pets o’ yourn along an’ give somebody else a chance in here. Do you call that pullin’? Which way you movin’? Touch ’em up, my man; touch ’em up.”

“I’m driving this team,” answered Joel, roundly, “and I don’t need advice from any assistant wagon master as to *how* to drive. They pull better without the lash.” And he sung out vigorously: “Buck! Muley! Hep, now! Hep with you!”

The wagon moved steadily, ploughing through the sand and encouraging the teams behind. But Joel’s reply seemed to enrage Yank—who had been waiting for just such a chance.

“Oh, gimme that whip!” he snarled, and snatched it from Joel’s hand. “Get out o’ there with you!” he yelled. The lash flew hissing; the snapper landed with a distinct “thut!” on the haunch of the right

lead ox; it jerked smartly back and out-sprang at the spot where it had struck a rim of blood on the sweaty, dusty black hide. The whip end had cut through to the quick!

As fast as lash could travel (and that was fast indeed) the other lead ox felt like smart and humiliation. With frenzied, panting snort and groan the yoke quivered and strained, setting shoulders forward and fairly jerking the swing yokes after them. It was an unnecessary strain and Davy knew it.

“Whoa-oa-oa, boys!” soothed Joel. “Easy now!” And turning like a tiger on Yank, who again was swinging the whip, he knocked him flat on his back.

The team went toiling on but Joel stood, panting, over Yank, and watched him scramble up. Yank’s hand flew to his revolver butt—and there it stopped; for when he got that far he was looking into the big muzzle of Joel’s own Colt’s navy.

“None o’ that either!” growled Joel, boiling mad. “Gimme that whip,” and he snatched it back again. “I’ve a notion to lay it on *your* back. You call yourself a man and abuse dumb beasts that are doing the best they can and doing it well?” He shook his big fist in Yank’s evil face, which was turning from the red of anger to the white of fierce hate. “You touch my team again and I’ll *kill* you!” roared Joel. “I told you they were to be let alone and I mean it. Stick that in your pipe and smoke it.”

Yank said nothing. His eye, where Joel’s fist had thudded, was swollen shut, but out of the other he glared steadily; and while he did not move a muscle (he knew better than to move with that revolver muzzle trained upon him), if a look could have killed, then Joel would have dropped in his tracks.

Joel slowly backed away, keeping his Colt’s ready.

“Remember,” he warned. “Don’t try that again.” And finally, having backed far enough, beyond the fringe of men who had gathered, he hastened after his wagon. Davy’s heart could beat again.

“Joel was right in this,” proclaimed a teamster. “You may be assistant wagon boss but even the boss himself has no business

whipping another man's bulls." And as the men resought their wagons heads wagged and voices murmured in agreement therewith.

As for Yank, he was growing red again; he cautiously wiped his injured eye, his hand twitched upon the butt of his revolver, and picking up his hat he stumbled forward as if in a dream. The way he acted was more dangerous, it seemed to Davy, than if he had stormed and threatened. And Davy was afraid for Joel.

The train passed through the sandy hollow without further mishap; and when they climbed out and pulled on over the next rise they met the buffalo hunters returning. The mules' saddles were red with meat, and the three riders were well pleased with their hunt.

The sun was low over the trail before, making golden the dust of travel.

"We'll camp here, boys," called Charley, cheerfully, "and do what butchering we need on those buffalo carcasses. Swing out, Joel. Whew, man! You must have had to lay on the lash a bit heavy, didn't you?" For the haunches of the lead team were bloody welted. More than that, the cracker seemed to have taken a piece of hide out the size of a quarter!

"No," said Joel, briefly. "I didn't."

"Well," continued Charley, "let's corral where we are. Yank, you—what's the matter with your eye, man?"

"I fell down," answered Yank, steadily. And at the laugh which went up he reddened deeply again, and again his hand twitched.

XVII

DAVY “THE BULL WHACKER”

Charley scanned him quizzically for a moment.

“You must have fallen mighty hard,” he remarked. “Who hit you, Yank?”

“That lead teamster o’ yours,” growled Yank, with a string of oaths. “I’ll get him for that. No man can strike me and stay long on this earth. The dirty hound!” And he abused Joel horridly.

Joel heard the loud words, and suddenly leaving his team where it stood, came walking fast.

“None of that!” he called. “You keep a quiet tongue in your head. You can see what he did to my bulls, Charley. He laid my whip on them. I allow no man to cut my bulls. I never cut them myself. They were doing as well as they could.”

Charley quickly stepped between the two—for the hand of each was poised for the dart to revolver butt.

“That’s enough,” he bade. “There’s to be no fighting in this train and no swearing. You both know that. Give me your guns. Pass ’em over.”

“All right, Charley,” answered Joel. “Here are mine if you say so. I don’t need a gun to deal with that fellow.” And unbuckling his belt he tossed it aside.

“Now it’s up to you, Yank,” addressed Charley.

Yank flushed.

“My guns are my own, an’ I’m goin’ to wear ’em as long as I please,” he blurted.

“No, you aren’t, Yank,” retorted Charley, coolly. Looking him in the eye, he walked straight to him. “You needn’t give them to me; I’ll take them. See?”

He was a little man, was Charley, but he had a great heart and the nerve to back it up. Reaching, while Yank stood uncertain and cowed, he jerked both revolvers from the holsters; then he stepped back to put his foot on Joel’s belt.

“That’s enough,” he said. “I want this matter to end right here. If you laid whip on another man’s bulls when there wasn’t any need of it I reckon you got about what you deserved. We’re not bull skinners in this train. But I’ll have no fighting in the outfit. You fellows can settle your differences after you leave. Go on and finish your corralling, Joel. Yank, you saddle a fresh mule from the cavvy and ride out and help Kentuck and Andy butcher those buffalo. Your mule’s plumb worn out. Hear me?”

Yank glared at him for a moment, but Charley returned eye for eye. Presently Yank whirled on his heel, and snatching the bridle of his mule strode off, muttering, to the cavvy. Joel went back to his team. Charley shook the cylinders out of the four revolvers, dropped them into his pockets, and stowed the useless weapons in one of the wagons. The train proceeded about the business of the hour, and Davy, whose heart had been beating high, helped.

“The ride out yonder will help to cool his blood a bit,” commented one of the teamsters, referring to Yank—who, leading Andy and Kentuck, was galloping furiously away. As for Joel, he was acting as if the recent trouble was ancient history—except that when he examined the wounds on his two beloved oxen he shook his head.

The teams had been unhitched from the wagons and were being led aside to water and pasture, when a sudden shout arose.

“Look at Yank! Look at him, will you! Where’s he going?”

Everybody stared. Leaving Andy and Kentuck behind, Yank, without slackening pace, was galloping on and on through the area where the buffalo herd had been and where the carcasses were

lying. Andy and Kentuck yelled at him, but he paid no heed. And from the wagon train welled another chorus of cries.

“He’s taking French leave! He’s deserting!”

“Let him go, boys,” quoth Charley, coloring, but making no move. “I’ll send him his guns sometime; but he’s forfeited his pay. If he wants to have things that way, good enough. We’re better off without him.”

The men grunted, satisfied; nobody liked the unruly, foul-mouthed Yank. Soon he disappeared over a rise and he was not seen again by Davy for a year.

The camp that evening seemed much pleasanter without the presence of Yank. With him absent and with plenty of buffalo meat on hand, the men laughed and joked to even an unusual extent. It was a carefree camp.

“Here are your guns, Joel,” said Charley, returning them. “Guess I can trust you with them now. Well, we’re a short train, with two men shy. I’d rather lose Yank than Sailor Bill; but they’re both gone. Kentuck, you’re promoted to assistant wagon boss; and I’ll have to turn your team over to Dave, here. They’re well broken and I reckon he can drive them. How about it, Dave?”

Davy was somewhat flustered. He to be a bull whacker? Hurrah!

“I’ll try,” he stammered.

“Sure you will; and you’ll make good. Fact is, those bulls drive themselves. But you can learn a heap, anyway. All right. You take Kentuck’s outfit in the morning and go ahead. The boys will help you if you get in trouble. I can’t spare Joel; he’s too good a man in the lead, and we need him there.”

That night Davy could scarcely go to sleep. He was excited. He wondered if he really could “make good” as a bull whacker. He had practised with the whip and could “throw” it pretty well, although it was a long lash for a boy. But he had found out that to wield a bull whip and “pop” it required a certain knack rather than mere strength; and, besides, the bull teams behind kept up with the wagons before

as a matter of habit. Of course, corralling and yoking were the chief difficulties. But he had watched closely what the men did every day, and he thought that he *knew* how, at least. At any rate, he was bound to try. To handle twelve oxen seemed to him a bigger job than being a messenger.

It was a proud Dave who, early in the morning, after breakfast, at the cry “Catch up, men! Catch up!” shouldered his yoke and the two bows, and sturdily trotted for the corral. He knew how to begin. The proper method was to lay the heavy yoke across one shoulder with the bows hanging from your arm. One pin was carried in your mouth, the other in your hand. The ends of the bows passed up through the yoke, so that only one end needed a pin thrust through above the yoke to hold it; the other end stayed of itself.

Davy felt that the men were watching him out of the corners of their eyes. He heard somebody say, aside, bantering: “Look out, boys, or that kid will beat us!” Of course he could not do *that*! Not yet. But Charley called to him from the forward gap, where somebody must stand to keep the cattle in: “The wheel team first, Dave. You know them, do you? A pair of big roans.”

Davy nodded. He remembered them; he had marked them well by a good scrutiny when the herd was being driven in from pasture.

“All right,” said Charley. “You’ll find them together. The whole bunch ought to be together.”

The corral was crowded with oxen and men, and appeared a mass of confusion; but there was little confusion, for by this time the oxen and the men all knew their business. Davy pushed his way straight to the two big roans (the largest and stoutest bulls always were chosen for the wheel team, because they must hold up the heavy pole and also must stand up to the weight of the wagon down hill), and in approved fashion laid the yoke across the neck of one.

“Be sure you yoke ’em like they’re used to travellin’, lad,” warned a kind teamster. “The near and the off bull, or you’ll have trouble.”

Davy nodded again. He had noted this also. The “near” bull meant the bull that was yoked to stand on the left; the “off” bull was the

right-hand one. The near bull of this team had a short horn, he remembered. He slipped the bow under the near bull's neck, and standing on the outside, or left, inserted the ends of the bow up through the yoke and slipped the pin in to hold it. Then he hustled around to the opposite side of the "off" bull, who was standing close to his mate, shoved him about ("Get 'round there, you!" ordered Davy, gruffly), and reaching for the yoke lifted it across, adjusted the bow (from the outside), slipped in the pin from his mouth—and there he had his wheel pair yoked together!

Now proud indeed, he led his yoke out through the other bulls to his wagon. They took position on either side of the pole, although they seemed a little puzzled by the change in manager. Now it only remained to lift the pole and put the end through the ring riveted to extend below the middle of the yoke.

"Lead team next," said Davy, wisely, to himself, leaving his wheel team and hurrying to shoulder another yoke and its bows and re-enter the wagon corral.

Every man was supposed to know his twelve bulls as a father knows his children. Davy's lead team were spotted fellows, with long black horns. He went straight to them where they stood, waiting; yoked them masterfully and led them, too, out to the wagon. He put them in position, and with the four other yokes built his whole team—starting from the rear. The train was ready and watching, but not impatient. The men gave him time.

From the middle of each yoke the massive log chain by which they pulled ran between them back to the yoke of the pair behind—save that the wheel team pulled by the tongue and had no chain. Davy worked hard to hook the chains. A man stepped forward to help him; but Charley called promptly:

"Let him alone, boys. He's doing well. He'll get the hang of it. Every man to his own team, you know."

And Davy was glad.

"All set," he announced shrilly, for his team were hooked at last.

"All set," repeated Charley. "Line out, boys."

To brisk shout from Joel and crack of his whip the lead team straightened their chains and the wagon moved ahead. One after another the other wagons followed; and Davy's team fell into place almost before he had "popped" his whip and had joined in the cries:

"Haw, Buck! Hep! Hep with you!"

The train retook the trail, Davy trudging like any other bull whacker on the left side of his wheel yoke, his whip over his shoulder, his hat shoved back from his perspiring forehead. He doubted if even Billy Cody could have done better; and he wished that Billy might see him.

Ever the trail unfolded on and on, sometimes skirting the shallow Platte, sometimes diverging a little to seek easier route. It traversed a country very unattractive, broken by the clayey buttes and by deep washes, and running off into wide, sandy plateaus and bottoms, rife with jack-rabbits, coyotes, prairie-dogs, antelope, and occasional buffalo. The rattlesnakes were a great nuisance; the men killed them with the whip lashes by neatly cutting off their heads as they coiled or sometimes shot them. And almost every morning somebody complained of a snake creeping into his warm blanket.

The processions of emigrants continued as thick as ever, bound for "Pike's Peak," for Salt Lake, California and Oregon. Each day the stage for Denver and the stage for Leavenworth passed, dusty and hurrying; and now was given a glimpse, once in two weeks, of the Hockaday & Liggett stages, which travelled twice a month between St. Joseph, above Leavenworth, and Salt Lake City. Occasionally Indians—Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Pawnees and Sioux—came into the camps begging for "soog" and "cof" and "tobac."

Davy enjoyed every mile and he did splendidly. He enjoyed even the never-varying diet of "sowbelly" (salt pork), baked beans, hot bread, and sugarless, milkless coffee, eked out by buffalo meat and antelope meat when they could get it. Some of the men tried prairie-dogs—which weren't so bad as they sound, tasting and looking like chicken or rabbit. The main difficulty was to get them after they had been shot, for they almost always managed to tumble into their holes. Then, when anybody put a hand in to drag them out, it was

met by the angry whirr of a rattle-snake. A rattle-snake and a little owl seemed to live in each hole along with the prairie-dog family!

There were storms, coming up with startling suddenness. One storm, at Cottonwood Springs a hundred miles west of Kearney, Davy never forgot. It was a hail storm. First a mighty cloud of deep purple shot through with violet lightning, swelled over the trail in the west. Emigrants scuttled to secure their wagons, and at Charley's sharp commands so did the bull train.

"It looks like a twister, boys," shouted Charley, riding back along the train. "Better corral. I'm afraid for these bulls."

So the train corralled in a jiffy; and, unyoked, the bulls were driven inside. The tongues were hung in the draw ropes of the wagon covers and the wheels were chained, wagon to wagon. Slickers were jerked out from the wagons and donned; and the men prepared to crawl under the wagon boxes if necessary.

With angry mutter and swollen shape the purple cloud came on at a tremendous pace. The spin-drift of it caught the plain far ahead, and one after another the trains of the emigrants were swallowed in the blackness. When the first gust struck the bull train the touch was icy cold.

"Hail, boys! Hail!" shouted Charley. "Watch the bulls!"

Now sounded a clatter like rain on a sheet-iron roof; and across the landscape of sand and clay, and a cottonwood grove at the mouth of the creek, swept a line of white. The men dived for cover like prairie-dogs whisking into their holes.

Yes, it was hail! Such hail! Driven by a gale the stones, some as large as hickorynuts, and all as large as filberts, lashed the huddled train; whanged against canvas and wagon-box and with dull thuds bounded from the bulls' backs. Some of the animals shifted uneasily, for the stones stung. The others stood groaning and grunting with discomfort, shaking their heads when a particularly vicious missile landed on an ear. Under the wagons the men were secure; but Dave felt sorry for the poor bulls who turned and sought in vain.

As quickly as it had come the storm passed, leaving the ground white with the hail. Almost before the men had crawled out from underneath their wagons the sun was shining.

The hail had not damaged the bull train to any extent. There were dents in the tough wood where the heavy stones had struck, and several of the wagon sheets, forming the hoods, had been punctured in weak spots; but thanks to Charley's promptness in corralling, the animals had not stampeded. However, some of the emigrants had not fared so well, because they had not known what to do. After the bull train was yoked up again and was travelling on, it passed two emigrant outfits stalled by the trail, trying to recover their teams which had run away. Many of the flimsy cotton hoods used by the emigrants were riddled into strips.

The Overland Trail followed up the south side of the Platte, the same way by which Dave had come down with the Lew Simpson train a year before, after the fight in the mule fort. Where the North Platte and the South Platte joined current it continued on up the South Platte—and now to the north a short distance was the place where the mule fort had been located so hastily by Billy Cody and Lew and George Woods.

Soon the main trail for Salt Lake and California forded the South Platte to cross the narrow point of land for Ash Hollow at the North Platte and for Laramie and Salt Lake City. But the Denver branch proceeded on into the west by the newer trail to the mountains and Denver.

This branch of the Overland Trail down to Denver was only six months old, but already it was a well-worn trail, scored deep by the stages and by the thousands of emigrants and the constant freight outfits. The travel eastward, toward the States, was almost as great now as that westbound, for fall had come and everybody who was intending to return to the States had started so as to get there before winter. A winter journey by wagon across these plains was no fun.

After the parting of the trail, the next station on the route was Jules' Ranch. Jules was an old French-Indian trapper and trader, whose full name (as he claimed) was Jules Beni. His mother was a

Cheyenne Indian, and Jules had built a trading post here, a mile beyond Lodgepole Creek, for trade with the Cheyennes. Now Jules had turned his attention to the new business that had opened, and he was selling flour to the Pike's Peak "pilgrims" at a dollar a pound. He had been smart enough to break a new trail that would bring the travel between the North and the South Platte past his place—for the regular crossing was east of him. He was smart, was Old Jules, and now he had just been made stage agent.

"I want all you fellows to keep clear of Old Jules," cautioned Charley, as the train approached what some of the men jokingly called "Julesburg." "I've never seen him when he wasn't drunk and he's a corker for losing his temper and picking fights. Then he wants to kill somebody. When he's in liquor he's plumb crazy. He's shot two men and carries their ears in his pocket. I'm not afraid of him, and neither are you; but to-morrow's Sunday and we'll tie up near his place, and I don't want trouble."

"Why don't you pull right through, Charley?" asked Andy Johnson, as a spokesman. "We're agreeable. 'Dirty Jules' is no great attraction."

"Well," said Charley, "we usually do ease off on Sunday, and it's company orders and I don't propose to change the programme at this stage of the game."

XVIII

BILLY CODY TURNS UP AGAIN

The Russell, Majors & Waddell bull trains were under instructions to lie by over Sunday whenever possible. By some people this was accounted a waste of time. However, Mr. Majors especially insisted that Sunday should be Sunday wherever it fell, in town or on the danger trail. One day in seven might well be spent in rest even with a bull train. It brought the men and cattle through in better shape, and was a gain that way instead of any loss.

So that evening the wagon train corralled near the Platte River crossing, where the Salt Lake Trail turned north, about half a mile east from Jules' Ranch. The river was a great convenience, for on Sunday the men usually tried to slick up by bathing and washing their clothing and tidying generally. Therefore, after breakfast the brush near the river bank was soon displaying shirts and handkerchiefs of red and blue, and sundry pairs of socks, spread out to dry, while their owners sat around and fought mosquitoes and watched the wagon outfits. Some of these forded the river for Salt Lake, Oregon or California, but most of them kept on up the Denver branch.

This was interrupted by a distant hullabaloo—a yelling and cheering mingled. The air was thin and still and very clear, so that sound and eyesight carried far through it. The hullabaloo evidently came from Jules' Ranch, where at the group of buildings a crowd of people had gathered. Davy's shirt was dry, and he reached for it.

"Must be having a celebration over yonder," drawled Kentuck. "Reckon I'll go see."

He donned his red shirt and started. Several others made ready to go; and Davy, as curious as anybody, decided that he would go, too.

So, wriggling into his clothes, whether they were dry or not, he followed along up the trail to Jules' place.

The ranch was a small collection of adobe or sun-baked clay buildings, and a log shack which was the store. The main excitement was centred in front of the store. The crowd had formed a circle at a respectful distance. They were emigrants and a few of the Charley Martin bull train.

"What's the row?" queried Kentuck of a man at his elbow.

"'Pears like this fellow Jules is having a leetle time with himself," answered the man. "I 'low he's crazy. He's got whiskey and flour out thar on the ground and says he's mixing mortar. It's a good place for the whiskey, but it's an awful waste of flour."

Edging through the circle, Davy peered to see. A dirty, darkly sallow visaged, hairy man, in soiled shirt, and trousers sagging from their belt, was capering and screeching, and hoeing at a white mass which might have been real mortar. But the smell of whiskey was strong in the air, and there stood a barrel of it with the head knocked in. The white stuff was flour, for, as Davy looked, the capering hairy man grabbed a sack, tore it open and emptied it on the pile.

"I show you how I mek one gr-r-rand mortarr," he proclaimed. "Flour at one dollar ze pound, whiskey at ten dollars ze quart; zat ze way ol' Jules mek gr-r-rand mortarr. Wow! Hooray! If anybody teenk he mek one better mortarr, I cut off hees ears. Dees my country; I do as I please." And he hoed vigorously at his "mortar bed," and screeched and capered and threatened and boasted and made a fool of himself.

Some of the crowd laughed and applauded; but the majority were disgusted. To Davy it seemed a great pity that any human being should so lose all control of himself and be less human than an ape. He speedily tired of this silly exhibition by Jules, the store-keeper, and turned away for fresh air. He and Charley, the wagon boss, emerged from the crowd together.

"Old Jules is spoiling his own business, I reckon," observed Charley. "How any man can watch that in there and ever taste

whiskey again is more than I know. To see him make a fool of himself is better than signing a pledge."

The crowd rapidly wearied of this drunken Jules and his antics and dwindled away. As for Davy, he had decided to take a walk to the mouth of Lodgepole Creek, up the river a short distance. Lodgepole Creek emptied in on the opposite side of the Platte, and was named because the Cheyennes used to gather their lodge poles along it.

The Platte flowed shallow and wide, with many sand bars and ripples, and many deepish holes where the water eddied rapidly. The banks were fringed with willows not very high. From a rise in the trail Dave, trudging stanchly in his heavy dusty boots, beheld an object, far up the channel, beyond the willow tops, floating down.

It was a large object flat to the water, and as he peered he saw a flash as from an oar-blade. A boat! No—too large and low for a boat. It must be a raft with somebody aboard. Davy waited, inquisitive; for craft floating on the Platte were a curiosity. The upper river was too shallow, especially at this time of the year.

The raft came on gallantly and swiftly. It carried three persons and their outfit. The crew were standing up: one of them steering, behind, and one at either edge, with oars, was helping to fend off from the bars. It looked like an easy mode of travel, and Davy prepared to stand out and give the voyagers a cheer.

But just before the raft arrived opposite, going finely, it appeared to hang on a snag or else strike a sudden eddy; or perhaps it did both at once; nobody could tell. Under Davy's astonished eyes it stopped for a moment in mid-stream; the crew wildly dug with their oars and fell to their hands and knees; whirling around and around the platform fairly melted away underneath them, leaving only three black dots on the surface of the water. These were heads!

Waking to the situation, Davy waved and shouted; the swimmers may have seen him, he thought, because they were making for his side. The current bore them along, as sometimes they swam and sometimes they waded; and he kept pace to encourage. As the foremost neared the bank, Davy rushed down and waded in to meet

him and help him ashore. He wasn't a very large person—that drenched figure floundering and splashing for safety; he wasn't large at all; and extending a hand, to give him a boost, Davy gasped, only half believing:

"Why—hello, Billy! Gee whiz! Is that you?"

"WHY—HELLO, BILLY! IS THAT YOU?"

"Hello, Dave," answered Billy Cody, muddy and dripping, but calmly shaking Dave's hand. "I guess it must be. Where are Hi and Jim?" And he turned quickly to scan the river. "Good. They're coming. I knew they could swim. They can swim better than I, so I reckoned I'd get ashore as soon as I could. What are you doing here and where are you bound for?"

"I'm bull whacking for Russell, Majors & Waddell from Leavenworth to Denver," informed Davy, proudly. "Where are you bound for?"

"Back to the river." And by "the river" Davy knew that Billy meant the Missouri. "We didn't have any luck in the diggin's, so we thought we'd float home down the Platte to the Missouri and down the Missouri to Leavenworth. Well, we got this far, anyhow."

"Jiminy crickets!" shouted Hi, now plashing in. "If here isn't Dave waiting for us! Did you come all the way from Leavenworth to meet us, Dave?"

And there was a great shaking of hands.

"I dunno what the dickens happened to us out there," volunteered Jim, gazing at the river suspiciously. "One moment we were just sailing along and next moment we were swimming. No more sailoring for me; I'd rather walk with a bull team. Here we've lost our whole outfit and we're going home from the diggin's 'busted' flat."

"We didn't have much to lose; that's one comfort," said Billy. "Think how bad we'd be feeling if we'd struck it rich up in the mountains and every ounce was now at the bottom of the Platte! Huh! We've had our fun, anyhow. Who's your wagon boss, Dave?"

"Charley Martin."

“Where are you camped?”

“At the Platte crossing, just below Jules’.”

“All right,” quoth Billy, cheerily. “Come on, boys. I’m going down to the camp and see what I can get, and Charley’ll grub-stake us home.”

They had clambered up the bank into the dryness, and now they continued down the trail—Billy and Hi and Jim clumping and squashing, Davy tramping sturdily in his teamster costume of flannel shirt and trousers tucked into big boots.

“So you’re a sure-’nough bull whacker, are you?” asked Hi of Davy, with a grin.

“I was hired just as an ‘extra’ for carrying messages, you know,” said Davy, to be both honest and modest. “But we ran short of men so Charley put me at whacking. I can sling a whip some; that is, pretty good. The bulls are trained, anyway.”

“When did you begin?” asked Billy.

“Back at Plum Creek.”

“If you’ve held your job this far, then, I guess you can hold it as long as you like. Bully for you, Red.” And at Billy’s generous praise Davy blushed.

The excitement at Jules’ trading store had quieted and only the mess of whiskey-sodden flour remained. Billy and Jim paid scant attention to this, except that they, too, were disgusted when they heard what old Jules had been up to. They were more intent upon getting to the wagon train camp. And here Charley Martin and the whole outfit, in fact, received them with a great ado. Everybody in the train seemed to know Billy, and almost everybody knew Hi and Jim.

There was a stranger to Davy in camp. He had arrived in a light buggy drawn by a strong, spirited team of black horses, and was chatting with Charley. His name proved to be B. F. Ficklin—“Ben” Ficklin. He shook hands with Billy, and Billy introduced Dave.

“Mr. Ficklin, this is my friend Dave Scott, youngest bull whacker on the plains.”

“You want to watch out or he’ll catch up with you, Billy,” bantered Mr. Ficklin.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” answered Billy, carelessly. “But I’ve got a head start over him. I’m a prairie sailor sure now, and navigation on the Platte is closed!”

Not only in sailing on the Platte, but in many other feats Dave never did catch up with Billy Cody.

Mr. Ficklin was the general superintendent of the Russell, Majors & Waddell freighting and staging business. He bore the news that the company had taken over the stage outfit of Hockaday & Liggett, which ran twice a month from St. Joseph on the Missouri to Salt Lake on the Platte River Overland Route, and were going to combine the Leavenworth & Pike’s Peak Express with it. He himself was on his way from Denver, back down the trail to inspect the condition of the stations from the Platte crossing to the Missouri.

“We’re going to make this stage line a hummer, boys,” he informed. “Hockaday & Liggett have been running two times a month on a schedule of twenty-one days to Salt Lake; no stations, and same team without change for several hundreds of miles at a stretch. The company are putting in stations every ten and fifteen miles all along the Overland route from the river to Salt Lake, and stocking them with provisions and fodder. We’re buying the best Kentucky mules that we can find and ordering more Concord coaches; and we’re going to put a coach through every day in the year, from the Missouri to Salt Lake, on a ten-day schedule, by the Salt Lake Overland Trail to the crossing here, then north to Laramie and over the South Pass. A stage will be sent down to Denver, too.”

Mr. Ficklin evidently was an enthusiast. Davy had heard of him—a hard worker and a booster for the company that he loved.

“What’s ever become of the scheme of yours and that California senator, Gwin, to put a fast mail service through, horseback, from St.

Louis to San Francisco, by the Overland route, at $500 for each round trip," asked Joel of Mr. Ficklin.

"Nothing yet. Senator Gwin was right for it after our talk on the stage from California five years ago, and he introduced a bill in Congress; but the bill died. The California people are howling, though, for something better than news three weeks to six weeks old from the East. And mark my words," continued Mr. Ficklin, earnestly, "that's what will happen next—a pony express from the Missouri to the coast that will beat the stage."

"Do you think they'll stretch a line of relays clear across for two thousand miles and keep it going day and night passing the mail along?" demanded Billy, his eyes sparkling at the fancy.

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Ficklin, shortly.

"Well, when they do I want to ride one of the runs—one that will keep me hopping, too," declared Billy.

XIX

DAVY MAKES ANOTHER CHANGE

“Did you see my mother when you were back East, Dave?” asked Billy.

“Yes.”

“How’s she looking?”

“Not extra good, Billy. She’s not very well, and she said if I came across you to tell you she’d like to see you as soon as she could.”

“How are the girls?”

“They’re all right.”

“I’m sorry about ma,” mused Billy, soberly. “If she’s poorly I’m going home as straight as I can travel, you can bet on that.”

“We can give you a job with the bull train, Billy,” proffered Charley Martin. “We’re short of men.”

But Billy shook his head.

“No, sir. I’m due at the Cody place in Salt Creek Valley.”

“Well, Billy, in that case I’ll pass you through on the next stage, if there’s room,” volunteered Mr. Ficklin.

“I can hang on somewhere,” asserted Billy. “The pass is the main thing. Never mind the room.”

While they all were talking a new arrival halted near. It was an army ambulance—a wagon with black leather top, seats running around the inside, and four big black army mules as the team. It was bound west. A soldier in dusty blue uniform was the driver, and a corporal of infantry sat beside him, between his knees a Sharp’s carbine. From the rear of the ambulance another soldier briskly piled

out. By his shoulder straps and the white stripes down his trouser-seams he was an officer; by the double bars on his shoulder straps a captain. He wore a revolver in holster.

He walked over to the group and nodded.

“Hello, Ben.”

“How are you, captain.” And Mr. Ficklin arose to shake hands.

“Gentlemen,” continued Mr. Ficklin, “I want to introduce Captain Brown.”

“I believe I know the captain,” spoke Charley, also shaking hands.

“Hello, Billy,” addressed the captain, catching sight of him. “What’s the matter? Been swimming?”

“Yes,” laughed Billy. “The water’s a little cold up in the mountains, so I took my annual down here.”

“Billy’s been at the diggin’s, captain,” vouchsafed Mr. Ficklin. “He brought down so much gold in his hide that he couldn’t travel till he’d washed it out.”

Billy took their joking good-naturedly. That he was going home “broke” had not discouraged him at all.

“I know one thing, gentlemen,” he declared. “I’m not a miner, but I had to learn. The plains for me after this. You’ll find me bobbing up again.”

“Yes, you can’t keep Billy Cody down, that’s a fact,” agreed Mr. Ficklin. “Where are you bound, captain? Denver?”

“No, sir. Laramie. I’ve just come through from Omaha. I hear you fellows are putting on a daily stage to Salt Lake to connect there with the line for San Francisco.”

“Yes, sir. It’ll be running this month, and it’ll be a hummer. I’m on my way to inspect the stations now.”

“This is my friend Dave Scott, captain,” introduced Billy, in his generous way. “He’s the youngest bull whacker on the trail.”

“He must be a pretty close second to you, then, Billy,” remarked Captain Brown, extending his hand to Davy, who, as usual, felt embarrassed. “You started in rather young yourself!” The captain (who was a tanned, stoutly-built man, with short russet beard and keen hazel eyes) scanned Davy sharply. He scratched his head. “I don’t see why I can’t get hold of a boy like you or Billy,” he said. “I prefer red-headed boys. I was red-headed myself once, before the Indians scared my hair off.”

“You’re a bit red-headed now, captain,” slyly asserted Charley; for the captain’s bald pate certainly was well burned by the sun.

“Well, I *feel* red-headed, too,” retorted the captain. “So would you if every time you got a clerk he deserted to the gold fields. Lend me this boy, will you, Martin? He’s in your train, isn’t he? I’ll take him on up to Laramie with me and give him a good job in the quartermaster’s department. There’s a place there for somebody just about his size, boots and all.” And the captain, who evidently had taken a fancy to the sturdy Dave, smiled at him.

All of a sudden Davy wanted to go. He had heard of Fort Laramie, that important headquarters post on the North Platte in western Nebraska (which is to-day Wyoming) near the mountains, and he wanted to see it. Billy had been there several times with the bull trains out of Leavenworth, and had told him about it.

“I’d like to oblige you, captain,” answered Charley. “But we’re short handed this trip, and Davy’s a valuable man. He’s making quite a bull whacker. Besides, I reckon he’s counting on going to school this winter in Leavenworth; aren’t you, Davy?”

Davy nodded.

“I thought I’d better,” he said. “That’s one reason I left Denver.”

“He can go to school at Laramie,” asserted the captain quickly. “We have a school for the post children there, and it’s a good one.”

Davy listened eagerly, and it was plain to be seen how *he* was inclined. Denver meant only a short stay, for Charley was anxious to start back again before winter closed in on the plains, and there

might not be any chance to see Mr. Baxter, after all. Laramie sounded good.

“Oh, shucks!” blurted Jim. “If you want to let Dave out, Charley, I’d as lief go on to Denver and finish with you.”

“So would I,” added Hi.

“How about it, Dave?” queried Charley. “Is it Denver or Leavenworth, or Laramie, for you?”

“I’d like to try Laramie first-rate but I don’t want to quit the train unless you say so,” answered Dave, honestly. “I hired out for the trip, and Mr. Russell and Mr. Majors expect me to go through.”

“Mr. Majors knows me and so does Billy Russell,” put in the captain. “I’ll write Majors a letter and give him a receipt for one red-headed boy, with guarantee of good treatment. I tell you, Martin, the United States has need for one red-headed boy, name of Dave, in the quartermaster service at Fort Laramie; and I believe I’ll have to send a detail out on the trail and seize him by force of arms.” The captain, of course, was joking, but he also seemed in earnest. “If he’s employed by Russell, Majors & Waddell that’s recommendation enough, and I want him all the more.”

Charley laughed.

“Oh, in that case, and if he wants to go, I suppose I’ll have to let him, and take Jim and Hi on in his place. They two ought to be able to fill his job. If you say so, Dave, I’ll give you your discharge right away, and a voucher for your pay to date, and you can see how you like the army for a change.”

“Go ahead, Red,” bade Billy. “You’ll learn a heap, and I’ll be out that way myself soon. First thing you know you’ll see me coming through driving stage or riding that pony express. Whoop-la!”

And of this Davy did not have the slightest doubt.

Captain Brown declined an invitation to stay for dinner with the mess. He was in a hurry. So the exchange of Davy from bull whacking to Government service was quickly made. Before he was an hour older he had shaken hands with everybody within reach and

was trundling northward in the black covered ambulance beside Captain Brown. He knew that in another hour or two Billy himself would be travelling east, back to Salt Creek Valley and Leavenworth; and that early in the morning the bull train, with Charley and Joel and Kentuck and Hi and Jim and all, would be travelling west for the end of the trail at Denver.

This was just like the busy West in those days; friends were constantly mingling and parting, each on active business—to meet again a little later and report what they had been doing in the progress of the big country.

“You’re too young to follow bull whacking, my boy,” declared the captain. “It’s a rough life and a hard one. To earn your own way and know how to hold up your end and take care of yourself is all very well; but you’d better mix in with it the education of books and cultured people as much as you can while you go along. Then you’ll grow up an all-round man instead of a one-sided man. Laramie’s a long way from the States; but we’ve got a small post school and a few books, and it’s the home of a lot of cultured men and women. You’ll learn things there that you’ll never learn roughing it on the trail.”

And Davy looked forward to life at old Fort Laramie, the famous army post and freight and emigrant station on the Overland Trail to Salt Lake, Oregon and California.

The fording of the Platte was made in quick time to foil the quicksands. The North Platte was now scarce eighteen miles across the narrow tongue of land separating the two rivers above their juncture. It was struck at Ash Hollow. Ash Hollow had a grocery store for emigrant trade. The sign read “BUTTE, REGGS, FLOWER and MELE.”

Captain Brown halted here long enough to buy a few crackers and some sardines.

“Thought we’d stock up while we can,” he explained to Dave. “These and what buffalo meat we have will carry us quite a way.

Laramie's one hundred and sixty miles, and I'm going to push right through."

The four stout mules ambled briskly at a good eight miles an hour, following the trail into the west, up the south bank of the river. The trail was broad and plain, but it was not so crowded with emigrants as it had been before the Pike's Peak portion of it had branched off. However, there still were emigrants; and there were many bull trains bound out for Laramie and Fort Bridger and Salt Lake, for this was the main Overland Trail, dating back fifty years.

The ambulance rolled on without slackening, except for sand or short rises, until after sunset. Then the captain gave the word to stop. By this time he knew Dave's history, and Davy was liking him immensely. They clambered stiffly out. The driver and corporal unhitched the mules: and while the corporal made a fire for coffee, the driver (who was a private) put the mules out to graze.

"We'll take four hours, Mike," said the captain to the corporal. "Then we'll make another spurt until daylight."

"Yes, sir," answered the corporal, saluting.

"You'd do well to crawl in the wagon and sleep, after supper, Dave," advised the captain to Davy. "We'll be travelling the rest of the night. Can you stand it?"

Davy laughed. A great question, that, to ask of a boy who'd just been a bull whacker walking across the plains!

Nevertheless, Davy took a nap in the bottom of the ambulance; and more than a nap. When he awakened, he had been aroused by the jolting of his bed. A buffalo robe had been thrown over him, the captain was sitting in a corner snugly wrapped, and by the light of a half moon the ambulance was again upon its way.

In the morning, when they once more halted to rest and feed the mules, the country was considerably rougher, with hills and fantastic rocks breaking the sagy, gravelly landscape. The white-topped wagons of emigrants and the smoke of their camp-fires were in sight, before and behind; and not far ahead a bull outfit were driving their bulls into the wagon corral to yoke up for the day's trail.

Breakfast was coffee and buffalo meat; but Corporal Mike mounted one of the mules and rode off the trail. When he returned he had some sage chickens and an antelope. The sides of the ambulance had been rolled up; and about noon, pointing ahead the captain remarked to Davy:

“That’s Laramie Peak, beyond the post. We’ve got only about eighty miles to go and we’ll be in bright and early.”

The landmark of Laramie Peak, of the Black Hills Range of the Rocky Mountains, remained in sight all day, slowly standing higher. The sun set behind it. Davy snoozed in the bottom of the ambulance. The captain had spoken truth, for shortly after sunrise they sighted the flag streaming over Fort Laramie.

Old Fort Laramie was not so large a post as Fort Leavenworth; it was not so large as Fort Kearney, even. Davy was a little disappointed, for “Laramie” was a name in the mouth of almost every bull whacker in the Russell, Majors & Waddell trains out of Leavenworth, and the men were constantly going “out to Laramie” and back. The post stood on a bare plateau beside Laramie Creek about a mile up from the Platte; some of the buildings were white-washed adobe, some were logs, and some were of rough-sawed lumber. Back of the fort were hills, and beyond the hills, to the southwest, were mountains—Laramie Peak being the sentinel.

It was the important division point on the Overland Trail to Salt Lake; maintained here in the Sioux Indian country to protect the trail and to be a distributing point for Government supplies. It was garrisoned by both cavalry and infantry; on the outskirts were cabins of Indian traders and trappers and other hangers-on, and there were a couple of stores that sold things to emigrants. Sioux Indians usually were camping nearby, in time of peace.

Davy changed his rough teamster costume for clothes a little more suited to a clerk and messenger in the quartermaster’s department, and was put to work by Captain Brown, the acting quartermaster. The post proved a busy place, with the quartermaster’s offices the busiest of all; but the captain and Mrs. Brown saw that Dave was courteously treated and given a fair show. He went to evening

school, and had books to read; and once in a while was allowed time for a hunt. In fact, Fort Laramie, away out here, alone, guarding the middle of the Overland Trail through to Salt Lake, was by no means a stupid or quiet place.

Of course, the trail was what kept it lively, for every day news from the States and from the farther west arrived with the emigrants and the bull trains; and scarcely had Dave been settled into his new niche, when arrived the first of the new daily stages from the Missouri. It was preceded by a slender, gentlemanly man named Bob Scott, dropped off by one of the company wagons which was establishing the stations. Bob Scott was to drive stage from Fort Laramie on to Horseshoe, thirty-six miles, and he was here in readiness. He seemed to be well known on the trail, for many persons at the post called him “Bob.”

“When do you expect to start on the run, Bob?” asked the captain.

“I think about next Tuesday, captain,” answered Bob, in his quiet, easy tone. “The first coach leaves to-day, I understand, from St. Joe.”

“They’ll make it through in six days, will they?”

“Yes, sir. Ten days to Salt Lake is the schedule—an average of one hundred and twenty miles a day. At Salt Lake the express and passengers are transferred to the George Chorpening line to Placerville, California, and from Placerville they’re sent on to Sacramento and San Francisco. I understand the time from the Missouri River to San Francisco will be about eighteen days.”

“You haven’t heard what’s to be the name of the new company, have you, Bob?”

“Yes, sir. ‘Central Overland, California & Pike’s Peak Express’ is to be the name; the ‘C. O. C. & P. P.’”

Stables and express station and a relay of horses had been established adjacent to the post. The old stage company, Hockaday & Liggett, had worked on a loose, go-as-you-please system which was very different from the way that Russell, Majors & Waddell went at it. Now, with things in readiness along the line, clear to Salt Lake

City, Tuesday dawned on a post eagerly hoping that Bob Scott's calculation would prove true.

About eleven o'clock a murmur and hustle in the post announced that the stage was in sight. It came with a rush and a cheer—its four mules at a gallop, up the trail, the big coach swaying behind them, the driver firm on his box. Stain of dust and mud and rain and snow coated the fresh coach body, for all the way from the Missouri River, 600 miles, had it come, through all kinds of weather, and had been travelling night and day for six days. At top and bottom of the frame around the stiffened canvas ran the legend: "Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Co."

"Wild Bill" Hickok himself it was who, coolly tossing his lines to the hostler, waiting to take them and lead the horses to the stable, drawing off his gloves bade, for the benefit of his passengers:

"Gentlemen, you have forty minutes here for dinner."

At the same moment the station keeper's wife began to beat a sheet-iron gong as dinner signal.

XX

FAST TIME TO CALIFORNIA

Dave was heartily glad to see Wild Bill again—and Wild Bill seemed glad to see Davy.

“I heard you were out in this region,” said Wild Bill, after they had shaken hands. “Billy Cody told me.”

“When did you see him, Bill?”

“Last time was when I was out to his house about a month ago. He was planning on a trapping and hunting trip with a man named Harrington up in the Republican country north of Junction City. But he’ll be on the trail again in the spring; you mark my word.”

“So you’re driving stage, are you, Bill?”

“Yes; I’m running between Horse Creek and Laramie, forty-two miles. It’s a great outfit, the C. O. C. & P. P.—the finest coaches and mules I’ve ever seen, and plenty of stations and feed. Now it’s up to the drivers to make the schedule.” And Wild Bill sauntered off, nodding to acquaintances, to wash and eat.

Davy joined the group admiring the coach. It evidently had been prepared especially for the occasion of the first trip through. It was a new “Concord,” built by the famous stage-coach manufacturers, the Abbot-Downing Company, of Concord, New Hampshire. The large round, deep body was enclosed at the sides by canvas curtains that could be rolled up; and behind, it was extended to form a large roomy triangular pocket, or “boot,” for mail and baggage. The driver’s seat, in front, was almost on the level with the roof; and beneath it was another pocket, or boot, for express and other valuables. A pair of big oil lamps sat upon brackets, at either end of the driver’s seat. The coach body was slung upon heavy straps forming the

“throughbrace,” instead of resting upon springs; and here it securely cradled. It had been painted red and decorated with gilt.

This coach had space for six passengers, three in a seat facing three others in an opposite seat. The coach was filled, when it had arrived, with the six passengers and a lot of mail; Wild Bill on the box, and beside him a wiry little man, who was Captain Cricket, the express messenger.

Bob Scott and Wild Bill ate dinner together at the station. The fresh team of mules had been harnessed into the traces, and were being held by the heads. Bob looked at his watch, drew on his gloves, circuited the mules with an eye to their straps and buckles, laid his overcoat (a fine buffalo coat with high beaver collar) on his seat, and grasping lines and whip climbed up. Captain Cricket nimbly followed.

“All ready, gentlemen,” announced Bob, his foot on the brake, poised to release it. The passengers came hurrying out and into the coach. Bob gave one glance over his shoulder. Then—“Let ’er go,” he bade the hostlers.

“Whang!” his brake released; the hostlers leaped aside; out flew his lash, forward sprang the mules, and away went coach and all, in a flurry of dust, for the next run, to Horseshoe Creek, thirty-six miles. Run by run, up the Sweetwater River, over South Pass, down to the Sandy and the Green Rivers, through Fort Bridger and Echo Canyon, one hundred and more miles every day, would it speed, by relays of teams and of drivers, until the last team and last driver would bring it into Salt Lake.

Wild Bill took a horse and returned to his east station, to drive in the next westbound stage. Every day a stage came through, and presently the stages from the west began coming back. The driver who brought in a stage from one direction took back the stage going in the opposite direction.

The stages through to Salt Lake and to the Missouri brought considerable new life to Fort Laramie. Papers and letters from New York and San Francisco arrived so quickly after being mailed that it

was easy to see what a great treat this service was to Salt Lake and Denver and every little settlement along the whole route.

Mr. Ficklin was general superintendent of the line, and was constantly riding up and down. No person who passed by was better liked than Superintendent Ficklin. Mr. Russell was in Washington, but Mr. Majors appeared, once, stepping from the stage; and he had not forgotten Davy.

“Your pardner, Billy Cody, almost met his end this winter, my lad,” he informed. “Did you hear about it?”

“No, sir,” gasped Dave.

“Well, he did. He was up in central Kansas on a trapping trip, and lost his oxen and broke his leg and had to be left alone in a dug-out while his companion went one hundred and twenty-five miles, afoot, to the nearest settlement for a team and supplies. Billy got snowed in, couldn’t move anyway, a gang of Indians plundered him and might have murdered him, and when, on the twenty-ninth day—nine days late—his friend finally arrived and yelled to him, Billy could scarcely answer. Even then the snow had to be dug away from the door. But he reached home safely and he’s getting along finely now. He’s plucky, is Billy—and so was his friend, Harrington.”

“Maybe he won’t want to go out on the plains any more,” faltered Dave.

“Who? Billy Cody?” And Mr. Majors laughed. “You wait till the grass begins to get green and the willow buds swell, and you’ll see Billy Cody right on deck, ready for business.”

Back and forth, between Salt Lake and the Missouri River shuttled the stages of the Central Overland, California & Pike’s Peak Express. They seemed to be making money for the company, but rumors said that the company needed more money; in fact, the company were in a bad way. The expenses had been tremendous. The big coaches cost $1000 apiece—and there were fifty of them. The harness for each four-mule team was made in Concord, and it cost about $150. Then there were 10,000 tons of hay a year, at twenty to thirty dollars a ton; and 3,000,000 pounds of corn and

another 3,000,000 pounds of grain, at several cents a pound; and 2000 mules at seventy-five dollars each; and the wages of the men —$100 a month and board for the division agents, $50 and $75 a month for the drivers, $50 a month for the station agents, and $40 a month for the hostlers who took care of the mules.

But even under this expense it seemed as though the passenger fare of $125 to Denver and $200 to Salt Lake (meals extra at a dollar and a dollar and a half), and the heavy rates on express ought to bring the company a profit. Davy, trying to figure out the matter, hoped so. Of course, it was not his business, but a fellow likes to have his friends successful; and Dave looked upon Mr. Majors, and Mr. Russell, and Mr. Waddell as very good friends of his.

He took a trip, once in a while, on the stage east with Wild Bill, or west with “Gentleman Bob,” on quartermaster’s affairs, to some of the stations. There always was room on the driver’s box, and generally Wild Bill or “Gentleman Bob” was glad to have him up there along with the messenger.

“Gentleman Bob” proved to be as remarkable a character as Wild Bill Hickok. When approaching stations Wild Bill signalled with a tremendous piercing: “Ah-whoop-pee!” and arrived on the run. Gentleman Bob whistled shrilly. The teams for either of them had to be changed in less than four minutes, or there was trouble. The Overland stage waited for naught.

Wild Bill passed the news on to Gentleman Bob, and Gentleman Bob it was who passed it to Davy, as one fresh, windy morning in this the spring of 1860, Dave gladly clambered up to the driver’s box to ride through to the end of the run at Horseshoe.

“Let ’er go!” yelped Bob, kicking the brake free; and to mighty lunge and smart crack of lash the coach jumped forward, whirling away from the station for another westward spurt.

“This, oh this is the life for me,
Driving the C. O. C. & P. P.”

warbled Gentleman Bob, flicking the off lead mule with the whip cracker. No bull whacker in any Russell, Majors & Waddell outfit could sling a whip more deftly than “Gentleman Bob,” a “king of the road.” “Do you know what that means, nowadays, Red—‘C. O. C. & P. P.’?”

“What, Bob?”

“Clean Out of Cash & Poor Pay!”

“Aw!” scoffed Davy. “Is it as bad as that?”

“Pretty near,” asserted Bob. But that wasn’t his news. His news followed. “Do you know something else; what’s going to happen next on this blooming road?”

“Pony express!” hazarded Dave.

Bob turned his head and coolly stared.

“How’d you find out?”

“I guessed. Mr. Ficklin spoke about it a long time ago.”

“Well, she’s due, and Ben Ficklin and Billy Russell and Alex Majors and that crowd are back of it. You saw Billy Russell go through Laramie last month. He’s been buying hosses—the best in the country, two hundred of ’em, at from one hundred to two hundred dollars apiece. Read this advertisement in the paper; that’ll tell you the scheme.” And reaching in behind the leather apron which covered the front of the pocket or “boot” under his seat, Bob extracted a newspaper. He indicated with his thumb. “Read that,” he bade.

It was a “Missouri Republican,” date of March 26. The article said:

TO SAN FRANCISCO IN EIGHT DAYS
BY
THE CENTRAL OVERLAND CALIFORNIA
AND
PIKE’S PEAK EXPRESS CO.

> The first courier of the Pony Express will leave the Missouri River on Tuesday, April 3, at 5 o'clock p. m., and will run regularly weekly thereafter, carrying a letter mail only. The point of departure on the Missouri River will be in telegraphic connection with the East and will be announced later.
>
> ---
>
> The letter mail will be delivered in San Francisco in ten days from the departure of the Express. The Express passes through Forts Kearney, Laramie, Bridger, Great Salt Lake City, Camp Floyd, Carson City, The Washoe Silver Mines, Placerville, and Sacramento.
>
> ---
>
> W. H. RUSSELL, President.
>
> LEAVENWORTH CITY, KANSAS,
>
> March, 1860.

There was more than this to the advertisement, but these were the paragraphs that appealed to Davy.

"Pretty slick they've all been about it, too," resumed Bob, tucking the paper away again.

"You're right," spoke the express messenger—who was Captain Cricket, again on his way through to Salt Lake. "They've bought the ponies and hired the riders, sixty of them. The route's being divided into runs of seventy-five or a hundred miles, and stocked with horses, every ten or fifteen miles, for change of mounts."

"Do you think it'll pay?" asked Gentleman Bob.

"Pay? No! It can't pay. But it'll be a big advertisement for this company. They count on showing the Government that the Salt Lake Trail can be travelled quicker and easier than the old Butterfield overland trail through Texas, and on taking the mail and express business away from it."

“I’d like to ride one of those runs,” asserted Dave, boldly.

Gentleman Bob laughed and cracked his silk lashed whip, of which he was very proud.

“I expect you would, Red,” he agreed. “But this riding a hundred miles or more at a gallop without rest is no kid’s job, you’d find.”

“Billy Cody’ll ride, though, I bet a dollar,” returned Davy.

Gentleman Bob scratched his cheek with his whip stock, and deliberated.

“Well,” he said, “I shouldn’t wonder if he would.”

Events moved rapidly now after the Pony Express had been announced. Three new horses were stabled at the stage station; two were wiry ponies, the other was a mettlesome horse of such extra good points that Gentleman Bob pronounced him a Kentucky thoroughbred. The station force of men were increased by Pony Express employees, and a rider himself arrived who had been engaged to take the run from Laramie west to the next “home” station, Red Buttes, ninety-eight miles. His name was “Irish Tom,” and he did not weigh more than one hundred pounds; but every pound of him seemed to be good hard muscle.

Irish Tom had come in from the west. He said that he had been one of sixty riders hired at Carson City, Nevada, by Bolivar Roberts, who was the superintendent of the Western Division of the Pony Express. According to Irish Tom every man had to prove up that he was experienced on the plains and in the mountains, and could ride. Altogether, there were eighty riders waiting, stationed all the way across the continent from St. Joseph on the Missouri to Sacramento in California; there were over 400 picked horses, which would gallop at top speed up hill and down, through sand and mud, snow and water and sun, for at least ten miles at a stretch.

The start from both ends of the route, from St. Joseph and from Sacramento, was to be made (as advertised) on April 3. Of course there was no way of knowing at Laramie, for instance, whether the start had been made; the Pony Express would bring its own news, for the railroad and the telegraph were the only things that could beat

it, and these seemed a long way in the future. As for the Overland Stage, the Pony Express was scheduled to travel two miles to the stage's one!

April 3rd passed; so did April 4th and 5th. It was figured at the post and stage station that on a schedule of ten miles an hour, including stops, the 600 miles to Laramie would bring the first rider through early on April 6th. The west-bound rider would reach Laramie before the east-bound rider, because the distance from the Missouri River was the shorter distance.

Davy was among those who turned out at daybreak to watch for the first rider. He hustled down to the stage station. The air was frosty, ice had formed over night, and the sunrise was only a pink glow in the east, beyond the expanse of rolling, sage-brush plain. A group of stage and pony express employees and of people from the post had gathered, wrapped in their buffalo-robe coats and army coats, shivering in the chill air, but waiting. By evidence of this group the rider had not come; but the fresh horse was standing saddled and bridled (he was the Kentucky thoroughbred), and Irish Tom was also standing, ready, beside it. Irish Tom wore a close-fitting leather jacket and tight buckskin trousers, and boots and spurs and a slouch hat tied down over his ears with a scarf. At his belt were two revolvers and a knife; and slung to his back was a Spencer carbine, which could fire eight shots.

All eyes were directed down the trail.

"He's due," spoke the station agent. And—

"There he comes!" shouted somebody. "There he comes!"

"There he comes! Hurray! There he comes!"

Upon the dun sandy trail had appeared a black speck. How rapidly it neared! Every eye was glued to it; Irish Tom put foot into stirrup, hand upon mane; his horse, as if knowing, pawed eagerly.

Now the speck had enlarged into a horseman, rising, falling, rising, falling, upon galloping steed. The horse itself was plain—and through the still thin air floated the heralding beat of rapid hoofs.

The rider was leaning forward, lifting his mount to its every stride; the horse's head was stretched forward, he was running low and hard, and now the steam from his nostrils could be seen in great puffs. On they swept, they two, man and horse, every second nearer —and suddenly here they were, the horse's chest foam-specked, his nostrils wide and red, his legs working forward and back, forward and back, his rider a little fellow not much larger than Dave, crimson faced from the swift pace through the cold night. He swung his hat, and whooped, exultant. Up rose a cheer to greet him; and the crowd scattered, for into its very midst he galloped at full speed.

He jerked from underneath him a set of saddle-bags, and ere he had stopped he flung them ahead; the station agent sprang to grab them, and before the rider had landed upon the ground had slung them across Irish Tom's saddle and shouted: "Clear the way!"

Into his saddle leaped Irish Tom, tightened lines, thrust spurs against hide, and at a single great bound was away, bending low and racing like mad at full gallop on up the trail for Red Buttes, almost 100 miles westward again. In an astonishingly brief space of time he was around the turn and out of sight; but the rapid thud of his hoofs still echoed back.

XXI

“PONY EXPRESS BILL”

The name of the rider who had just arrived was Charley Cliff. As he stiffly swung from the saddle, a dozen hands were thrust at him to clap him on the shoulder and to shake his hand in congratulation.

“What did you make it in?”

“What time is it?” he panted.

“You arrived at five ten.”

“Is that so? Then I made the last twenty miles in sixty-two minutes.”

The horse looked like it. It staggered, weak-kneed, as the hostler carefully led it to the stable. Charley also slightly staggered from stiffness as he walked away with the agent through a lane of admirers, for breakfast and sleep.

Before the east-bound mail arrived on its swift journey from California to the Missouri River, Davy and everybody else at Laramie knew just how the system was being worked. Charley had been well questioned.

Only the best horses were used—horses that could beat Indian horses or anything else on the road. The Pony Express riders were supposed not to fight but to run away. Their Spencer carbine and two revolvers and knife were carried for use only in case that they couldn’t run away. They all had to sign the regular Russell, Majors & Waddell pledge, and each one was given a calf-bound Bible, just as with the bull trains. Small horses were preferred, and a very light skeleton saddle was used. A set of saddle-bags called a mochila (mo-cheela) was hung across the saddle; each corner was a pocket for the mail. The pocket flaps were locked by little brass keys, and

could be unlocked only by the station agents. The mochila was passed from rider to rider, and the mail was taken out or put in along the route. Of course, the most of the mail was through mail, from the East to the Coast, and from the Coast to the East. The rate was five dollars a half ounce, and most of the letters were written on tissue paper; the New York and St. Louis papers also were to be printed on tissue paper for mailing by the Pony Express. The limit was twenty pounds. Charley thought that he had brought about three pounds. The letters were wrapped in oiled silk, so that they would not soak with water, and were in Government Pony Express envelopes, which cost ten cents apiece. Later Dave saw some of these letters, directed to Laramie. Several addressed to the post sutler, for instance, from merchant houses, had as much as twenty dollars in postage stamps and Pony Express stamps on the envelopes!

Gradually the names of the Pony Express riders passed back and forth along the line. There were eighty of the riders, forty carrying the news in one direction, forty carrying it in the other. Out on the west end—the Pacific Division—were riding Harry Roff and “Boston,” and Sam Hamilton (through thirty feet of snow on the Sierra Nevada mountain range!) and Bob Haslam, and Jay Kelley, Josh Perkins, Major Egan. In and out of Laramie rode Irish Tom, and Charley Cliff, who was only seventeen years old. In and out of Julesburg rode Bill Hogan, and “Little Yank,” who weighed a hundred pounds and rode 100 miles without a rest. Further east, down the Platte, were Theo Rand and “Doc” Brink, and Jim Beatley, and handsome Jim Moore, and little Johnny Frye—who took the first trip out of St. Joe.

Their names and the names of other riders travelled from mouth to mouth—and soon tales were being told of storms and Indians and outlaws and accidents that tried to stop the express but couldn’t. No matter what conspired to stop him, the Pony Express rider always got through. The first relays had carried the mail from the Missouri River to Sacramento, California, 1966 miles, in nine days and twenty-three hours—one hour under schedule! And after that the mail went through, both ways, on schedule time or less.

So, regularly as clockwork, into Laramie galloped the rider from Mud Springs, with the west-bound mail, and the rider from Red

Buttes with the east-bound mail; in fifteen seconds the saddle bags were changed from horse to horse and out galloped the fresh riders. Davy burned to vault aboard the saddle, like Irish Tom or Charley, and scurry away, on business bent, to carry the precious saddle bags to the next rider.

But meanwhile, where was Billy Cody?

The question was soon answered by Billy himself when, one afternoon, into Fort Laramie pulled a Russell, Majors & Waddell bull outfit with Government freight from Leavenworth; also with Billy Cody riding beside Wagon Boss Lew Simpson! Never was sight more welcome to Dave, who from the quartermaster's office espied the familiar figure and immediately rushed out to give greeting.

Billy looked a little thin after the strenuous time that he had had on the trapping expedition when he was disabled and snowed in helpless; but he could shake hands and exchange a "Hello," before he swung from his mule and made for Jack Slade.

Mr. Slade was division superintendent of the stage and Pony Express, with headquarters at Horseshoe Station, thirty-six miles west from Laramie. Just now he was coming across the grounds and Billy stopped him.

"How are you, Mr. Slade?"

"How are you?"

"My name's Billy Cody, Mr. Slade. I want to ride pony express. Mr. Russell's sent me out to your division with a letter." And Billy extended the letter.

Mr. Slade was a straight, muscular, rather slender man, with smooth-shaven face, high cheek-bones, cool, steady gray eyes and thin straight lips. He had the reputation of being a dangerous man in a fight, and already he had driven Old Jules, down at Julesburg, into hiding. He was rapidly cleaning his division of outlaws and thieves.

Without opening the letter he scanned Billy from head to foot. Billy stood stanch.

“You do, do you?” presently said Mr. Slade. “You’re too young for a pony express rider, my boy. It takes men for that business.”

Evidently he did not know Billy Cody.

“I rode a while on Bill Trotter’s division, sir,” responded Billy, eagerly. “I filled the bill there, and I think I can do as well or better now.”

Mr. Slade seemed interested.

“Oh! Are you that boy who was riding down there a short time back, as the youngest rider on the road?”

“Yes, sir. I’m the boy.”

Mr. Slade proceeded to read the Russell letter. It must have recommended Billy highly, for Mr. Slade appeared to be satisfied.

“All right,” he said. “I’ve heard of you. I shouldn’t wonder if it would shake the life out of you, but maybe you can stand it. I’ll give you a trial, anyhow; and if you can’t stand up to it you can tend stock at Horseshoe. I’ll let you know your run in the morning.”

He walked away, and Billy turned to Dave with face aglow.

“I’ve got it!” he asserted. “Hurrah! It’s on the toughest division west of the mountains, too! I tell you that’s no joke, riding pony express—making eighty or a hundred miles at a dead gallop night and day, and changing horses every ten miles or so in less than two minutes.”

What luck! Or, no, not luck; Billy had earned it. That evening Dave and he had a great old-time visit exchanging news. Dave did not have much, it seemed to him, worth while to report, but Billy was full of adventures, as usual. Davy heard again all about the trapping trip of last winter, and how another Dave—Dave Harrington—had fought a heroic fight with the snow to find Billy in the dug-out, and rescue him. Billy was all right now; and after having had a short, rather easy, pony express run down the line, was here anxious to tackle something harder.

Mr. Slade went on to Horseshoe early the next morning, but he saw Billy before he left, and Billy got the assignment. He hailed Dave

in high feather.

“I’m off,” he announced. “But I’m on, too. I’ve got the run between Red Buttes and Three Crossings! Seventy-six miles—about the hardest run on the toughest division of the trail! Reckon maybe he thinks he has my scalp, but he hasn’t. I’ll go through like greased lightning. That’s an Injun and outlaw country both; and I have to ford the Sweetwater three times in sixty yards! Slade’s a hard man to work for, too, they say. He won’t stand for any foolishness. But I’ll get along with him all right as soon as he finds out I do my duty. So long, Red. I’ll see you later. You’ll hear from me, anyway. I told you I was going to ride pony express, remember? I used to think I’d be president; but I’d rather have this run than be boss at Washington all the rest of my life!”

He hastily shook hands. Dave envied him heartily, but he also wished him success. Nobody deserved success more than Billy. Of course, to be the youngest rider on the whole route from St. Joe to Sacramento was a big thing, and nobody can blame Davy for a trace of honest envy. He went back to his day’s routine. The bull train pulled out at once, and Billy started with it for his new job.

Soon word from him travelled back to Laramie and Dave by Irish Tom, who received the saddle bags from him at Red Buttes, and by Gentleman Bob, who heard from him through the other stage drivers. “Pony Express Bill” he began to be called; the “kid” rider between Red Buttes and Three Crossings, on the Platte and Sweetwater Rivers of the Salt Lake Trail in what is to-day south central Wyoming but which was then western Nebraska Territory.

Great things were reported of Billy. One time when the rider west of him was killed, Billy rode his own run and the other run, too, and all the way back again—322 miles at a stretch! When Mr. Slade learned of this he said: “That boy’s a brick!” and he gave Billy extra pay.

Another time bandits stopped Billy and demanded his express package, which they knew contained a large sum of money. But Billy was smart. He had hidden the real package under his saddle, and now he threw them a dummy package containing only paper. When

they stooped to pick it up and examine it he spurred his horse right over them and was away, flying up the trail—and although they fired at him they never touched him!

Another time the Sioux Indians ambushed him, and when he dashed past they chased him. But he lay flat on his pony's back while the arrows whistled over him, and he rode twenty-four miles without stopping.

Another time one bandit halted him in a lonely canyon.

"You're a mighty leetle fellow to be takin' sech chances," said the bandit, while he held his gun pointed at Billy's head.

"I'm as big as any other fellow, I reckon," answered Billy, coolly.

"How do you figure that?" asked the bandit.

Billy tapped his Colt's revolver.

"I may be little, but I can shoot as hard as if I were General Jackson," he warned.

"I expect you can, an' I reckon you would," chuckled the bandit, tickled with Billy's nerve; and he let him ride on.

So it was not long before "Pony Express Bill" was drawing $150 a month pay, which was the top wages paid on the road.

Meanwhile Dave felt that his work at Fort Laramie was rather tame. It was just the same thing day after day, with only ordinary pay, and three meals a day, and a good bed at night, and a lot of friends —and—and—that seemed about all, except that he was learning all the time from books and from the people about him; and he knew that he was growing inside as well as outside. To tell the truth, he was doing first-rate and getting ahead, and was being given more and more responsibility and showing that he could carry it; but of course he wanted to prove his pluck by riding pony express. That *seemed* bigger—whether it really was or not.

His chance came, as it generally does to everybody who waits for it and holds himself ready. All the summer there had been talk among the army officers at the post and between them and the stage

passengers who passed through of affairs in the East, where a presidential campaign was being hotly carried on. It appeared, by the talk and by the papers, that a man named Abraham Lincoln was a candidate of the North, and that Stephen A. Douglas was a candidate of the South, and that if Mr. Lincoln was elected South Carolina and other Southern States threatened to withdraw from the Union. They claimed that each State had the right of governing itself, and that States and Territories should decide for themselves whether or not they would own slaves within their borders.

The question as to whether Kansas should be “slave” or “free” had caused fighting when that territory was being settled; and Billy Cody’s father, who was a “Free State” man, had been so badly stabbed that he never recovered. The settlement of Nebraska Territory also had brought on much bitter feeling between North and South—for the North was against the extension of slavery. So was Abraham Lincoln. The army officers at Fort Laramie, some of whom were Northerners and some Southerners, declared that the election of Lincoln would mean war; according to the Northern officers, if the Southern States tried to withdraw; according to the Southern officers, if the Southern States were not permitted to withdraw.

The election was to be held on November 6, and it would be November 10 before the news of who won could reach Laramie by the Pony Express. That was a long time at the best when such important events were occurring; but even at that Davy (who was as impatient as anybody) found that he might be disappointed, for he was ordered by Captain Brown to take the stage west in the morning and go up the line to Horseshoe Station on Government business.

When the stage left, early, Irish Tom was still standing ready beside his horse to take the saddle bag from Charley Cliff. Charley had not come—and it was learned afterward that the mail was late in starting from St. Joseph because it had waited for the election news.

So Dave mounted the driver’s box on the C. O. C. & P. P. stage beside Gentleman Bob, and they drove away and left the unknown news behind them.

However, not for long. They had gone scarcely fifteen miles when Gentleman Bob, who had been constantly glancing over his shoulder, exclaimed: “There he comes! Look at him, will you!”

By “he” could be meant only one person—the Pony Express rider. Yes, the Pony Express it was—a dark spot, rising, falling, rising, falling, pelting up the dusty trail.

“He’s certainly going some,” commented the stage messenger, who this time was not Captain Cricket, but was Jack Mayfield.

Bob flung his lash over the backs of his four mules and broke them into a gallop. But although the stage was empty this trip and the mules fresh, and the road smooth, the pony express closed in as fast as if the coach were standing still.

“Going to pass us,” laughed Bob, and slowed his team.

And the pony express *did* pass them. There was sudden staccato of hoofs, like a long roll of a drum—a rush, a whoop—“Who’s elected?” yelled Bob, turning in his seat to meet the onswoop.

“Lincoln. New York gives fifty thousand majority,” shouted back Irish Tom; and in a cloud of dust he was away, leaving a flake of froth on the coach box at Davy’s feet.

“Lincoln, huh?” remarked Gentleman Bob. “Well, I wonder what’ll happen now. But that boy’s sure riding,” and he gazed reflectively after Irish Tom.

XXII

CARRYING THE GREAT NEWS

“Lincoln’s elected!” The words continued to ring in Davy’s ears, and the flying shape of the Pony Express, bearing the great news, was constantly in his eyes as at trot and gallop the stage rolled along the Salt Lake Overland trail from Fort Laramie on. Irish Tom and his hard pushed pony were out of sight, but they were not forgotten.

The trail was almost deserted this morning; only one emigrant train was passed, and, drawing aside to let the stage by, it cheered to the three persons on the box: “Hooray for Lincoln!”

Davy cheered back; but Gentleman Bob and Messenger Mayfield looked straight ahead and said nothing. That was the fashion. Emigrant trains and bull trains were considered beneath the notice of the stage coach box.

However, in another mile something did attract the notice of Gentleman Bob, whose eyes were ever on the lookout, although he usually spoke little.

“Looks like trouble, yonder,” he remarked, pointing with his whip. “How’s your gun, Jack? O. K.?”

“Yes.”

“Better have it ready. Red, you get down in the boot under the seat and stay there, when I say so. You’re liable to be shot full of holes.”

Bob gathered his lines tighter and peered keenly. His jaw set, as, holding up his mules, prepared for sudden dash, he sent them forward at brisk trot. Messenger Mayfield shifted his short double-barrelled gun loaded with buckshot from between his knees to his lap and pulled down his hat.

Half a mile before, in the hollow of the sweeping curve which the coach was rounding, was a riderless horse moving restlessly hither-thither in the brush beside the trail; he was equipped with saddle and bridle—at least so Bob muttered, and so the messenger agreed, and so Davy believed that he, also, could see—but of the rider there was no sign *yet*.

Indians! Then why hadn't they taken the horse? Or road agents, as the bandits were called! The rider must have been shot from the saddle. And would the coach, passing, find him? Or were the Indians, surprised in the act, ambushed and waiting? Or what *had* happened, anyway?

"That's the Pony Express horse, gentleman," said Bob, quietly. "I know the animal. There's been bad work."

Mr. Mayfield, who was as nervy as Bob himself, nodded; Davy breathed faster, his heart beating loudly; Bob flung his lash, straightened out his team, and with brake slightly grinding descended the hill at a gallop.

"I see him!" exclaimed Messenger Mayfield. "At the edge of the road. He's hurt, but he can move."

Davy, too, could see a dismounted man—Irish Tom or somebody else—half raising himself from the ground, and crawling into the trail, where he sat waving his handkerchief.

With rattle and shuffle and grinding of brake the coach bore down, prepared to stop—and prepared for anything else that might befall.

Yes, it was Irish Tom, the Pony Express rider, and that was his horse, the saddle bags still on it, fidgeting in the brush. Tom was half lying, half sitting, supporting himself with one arm and waving with the other. His hat was gone, his uplifted hand bleeding, one leg seemed useless, and altogether he appeared in a sad state.

In a cloud of dust from the braced hoofs and locked wheels Gentleman Bob halted with the leaders' fore hoofs almost touching Tom.

"What's the matter here?"

Tom's face, grimy and streaked and pinched with pain, gazed up agonizedly, but he did not mince words. The Pony Express rider was superior even to a stage driver.

"Catch that horse for me. I've broken my leg."

Down from the box nimbly swung Mr. Mayfield; jamming his brakes tighter and tying the lines short, down swung Gentleman Bob. Down clambered Dave.

"How'd it happen?"

"Fell and threw me. Catch him and help me on; and hurry up."

"Catch him, Jack; you and Dave," bade Bob, crisply. "Where's it broken, Tom?"

"High up, but that doesn't matter. I'll ride if it kills me. I'm late now."

Luckily the horse was easily caught; his dragging lines, entangled in a sage clump, held him until Mr. Mayfield laid hand upon them. When Dave, with Mr. Mayfield leading the horse, returned into the road and hustled back to Bob and Tom, Bob was arguing tensely.

"But you can't, Tom! You can't do it, man! You can't fork a saddle with your hip broken."

Tom struggled to sit up—and the great beads of sweat stood out on his red brow.

"You help me on, and tie me there; that's all I ask. I'll make it. I've *got* to."

"We'll take you on to the next station, and the saddle bags, too," retorted Bob. "That's the quickest way. Strip that horse, Red. Give me a lift with Tom, here, Jack. Open the coach door."

"But there's nobody except the agent at the next station, Bob!" appealed Tom, wildly. "Who'll take the express?"

"Then we'll go through to the next station. They can send somebody from there, I reckon."

Suddenly a great thought struck Davy—and he wondered why the same hadn't occurred to the others.

“I’ll ride it, Tom! I’ll ride it, Bob! Let *me*.” And he sprang for the express pony.

Bob slapped his dusty thigh: The idea struck him.

“Go it,” he exclaimed. “Take those lines. Unbuckle your guns, Tom, old man, while I hold you.”

“Somebody put my spurs on him,” panted Tom, tugging at his belt buckle.

Words had been rapid, fingers worked fast; and almost in less time than it takes to tell it, after the halting of the coach, Davy was in the Pony Express saddle, with the final orders filling his ears.

“Now ride, boy; ride!”

Scarcely yet settled into the stirrups, he bounded forward (the jerk of the mettlesome pony almost snapped his head loose), and was away.

“Ride, boy; ride!”

Davy jammed tighter his hat; his feet clinging to the stirrups, he half turned in the saddle and waved his hand to the little group behind. They would see that he was all right. They were grouped just as he had left them: Mr. Mayfield standing, where he had strapped the spurs to Davy’s heels after Dave had mounted; Gentleman Bob half erect, over Tom, from whom he had passed the revolver belt.

But even as Davy looked, they all moved, preparing to lift Tom into the coach. Davy faced ahead and settled to his work.

“Ride, boy; ride!”

Well, he *could* ride! he knew how; and if he didn’t know how he was bound to stick, anyway. There were the plump saddle bags under him, crossed by his legs; he was carrying the fast mail—and Lincoln was elected!

The pony ran without a break and needed no urging. He was trained to his work—a stanch, swift, apparently tireless animal. The wind smote Davy in the face, bringing water to his eyes; the sandy, beaten trail flowed backward beneath them like a dun torrent, the

sage and rocks reeled dizzily past on either hand, and amidst the rhythmic beat of hoofs the pony's breaths rose to snorty grunts.

Now another emigrant train for Salt Lake City and the Mormon colony dotted the trail before. Past them thudded Dave, and as he raced down the line he yelled shrilly:

"Lincoln's elected! Lincoln's elected!"

"By how much?"

"New York gives him fifty thousand!"

Dave was not certain what this conveyed, exactly, but it had sounded important from Irish Tom.

Some of the train cheered, some growled, but he speedily left both cheers and growls behind him.

The first of the stations appeared ahead—a blot of darker drab beside the trail. This was one of the way stations—the stations where horses were changed in less than two minutes. Two minutes was the limit, but frequently the change was made in fifteen seconds.

Dave's pony seemed to know where he was and what was at hand. He snorted, and at pick of spur let himself out a little longer in his stride and doubled and stretched a little faster.

The station swiftly enlarged. A poor place it was, Dave remembered: a low log cabin, sod roofed, with rude log stable close behind it, and a pole corral. The station man would be about as rude in appearance: unshaven, well weathered, dressed in slouch hat, rough flannel shirt, red or blue, belted trousers and heavy boots. There he lived, by the roadside, 700 miles into the Indian country, alone amidst the unpeopled, rolling sagy hills through which flowed the North Platte River and extended, unending, the ribbon-like road. Dave could see him standing in front of the buildings, holding the relay horse and peering down the trail for its rider. The stations were required by the company to have the fresh horse saddled and bridled and ready half an hour before the express was due.

Dave knew his duty, too. Not slackening pace, he loosened from the fastenings the saddle bags under him. Up at full gallop he

dashed, and even before he had pulled his pony to its haunches, he tore the saddle bags from beneath him and tossed them ahead. Then he was off in a twinkling, staggering as he landed.

“Quick!” he gasped, out of parched throat.

The station man had stared, but he grabbed the saddle bags.

“Who are you? Where’s Tom?”

“Hurt. Coming on stage.”

The saddle bags were clapped on the other saddle. Dave grasped the bridle lines.

“Bad?”

“Leg broken.” And Davy, thrusting foot into stirrup, vaulted aboard almost over the station man’s head.

One last twitch to the saddle bags.

“What’s the news?”

“Lincoln’s elected. New York gives him fifty thousand majority.” And away sprang Dave, headlong on the next leg of his route.

Thudding through the sand, clattering over the rocks, echoing through short defiles, ever urging his pony, rode Davy. He was resolved to go clear through, to the home station at Red Buttes, over sixty miles. The stations ahead had no means of knowing that an accident had befallen the regular rider; and to mount another substitute, at short notice, would consume valuable time. At Red Buttes Billy Cody would take the saddle bags—and to give them to Billy he must.

At the next station, fourteen miles, the station man had helpers in the shape of two hostlers or stable hands. They also gazed, astonished at sight of Dave instead of Irish Tom; but no one wasted precious moments in explanations. The conversation was much the same as before—and on his fresh horse Dave spurred again up the long, long trail. He passed a toiling bull train. “Lincoln’s elected,” he shrieked as before; but he was going so fast that he did not catch their response. He only noted them wave their whips in salute.

Horseshoe Station hove into view. This was headquarter's station for the division. Here stayed, when not on the trail, Mr. Slade, the division superintendent; and he was in front of the station cabin with the other men, peering down the road.

Davy galloped in. He was assailed by a volley of queries—until Mr. Slade cut them short.

"No matter," he bade curtly. "Fasten that mochila. Now ride, my lad; you're half an hour late!"

"Lincoln's elected," gasped Davy, spurring away.

He was getting tired. His feet were growing numb, and his ankles were being chafed raw. Before he arrived at the next station, the Platte River had to be forded. As he passed through, a man sprang into sight, in the trail at the farther bank. Dave's heart leaped into his throat. The man was partially screened by willows. He was armed. With ears pricked, the horse forged ahead, and the man waited. To leave the stream bed required a little climb up the rather steep bank, and as Dave reached it out whipped the man's revolver and the muzzle was trained true at Dave. It seemed to him that the round hole covered every inch of his body. His horse shied and balked.

"Throw off that mail bag."

The man was "Yank," assistant wagon boss under Charley Martin! Dave recognized him at once, although the slouch hat was pulled low. But beneath the brim the eyes were those of "Yank."

"No," panted Dave, trying to hold his voice steady and think of what Billy Cody or Irish Tom would do. "It's only election news."

"Throw off that mail and be quick, too," ordered "Yank," with a string of curses.

Hardly knowing what he did, but resolved to do something, Dave plunged his spurs into his pony's heaving flanks. With a great snort and a long leap the pony lunged forward straight up the bank. "Yank" uttered a sudden vicious exclamation and dived aside; but the horse's shoulder struck him, hurled him aside, and at the instant veering sharply into the fringe of willows Dave sent his mount

crashing through. The willows slapped him in the face and on the body. He bent low—in a moment more they were out of the willows, again into the trail, and tearing onward. He heard a shot—just one; but the bullet went wide, and thudity, thudity, he was galloping safe. A little shaky, Dave laughed; he felt like giving a whoop—although he could not spare breath for even that. He imagined, though, how mad "Yank" must be, and this was what had made him laugh.

Even with the excitement of the hold-up that failed, the road began to seem wearisome, the ride one monotonous pound. The chafing stirrups tortured his ankles almost beyond endurance—but not quite; no, not quite. The saddle chafed his thighs. His mouth was parched, he could scarcely breathe; he could scarcely see, when, ever and anon, his head swam giddily. He forded the river again. From throbbing pain, his ankles changed to the relief of numbness, and his feet, blistered, and his blistered thighs gradually ceased to be his; they felt as if they belonged to somebody else.

He had vague recollection of arriving at the way stations, of staggering from horse to horse, of being helped into the saddle, of voices hailing him, and hands and voices forwarding him on again. Once he passed the east-bound stage—and again he passed it, or another: and he piped to the staring faces: "Lincoln's elected. New York gives fifty thousand majority." The words issued mechanically, and he did not know what effect they had.

He had vague recollection that a bevy of Indians yelled at him and flourished their bows, and that he heard the hiss of arrows travelling even faster than he; but he could not stop to argue. The one fact that stuck in his mind was that he was nearly on time. "Three minutes late," he thought that somebody said at the last station where he changed horses. And—"Go it, lad! You're a plucky one."

"Three minutes late" was all. The thought buoyed him up and glued him to his saddle. Gallop, gallop, over rock and sand, through brush and through the bare open and through occasional scrubby growth of trees; through shaded canyons, and through the burning, windy sunshine.

Was that Red Buttes? Was that really Red Buttes at last—the end of his trip, where waited Billy Cody? Supposing Billy wasn't there; would they want *him* to continue riding, riding, forever? He uttered a little sob of despair, but he set his teeth hard, and resolved that he'd do it; he'd do it, if he *had* to.

The road was hilly and his horse flagged. He spurred ruthlessly and struck with his hat. If he did not arrive on time he would be ashamed, for nobody could know how hard he had tried. Up the hill he forced his pony and would not let him relax into a trot. Down the grade he galloped—every forward jump a torment. Red Buttes—that *must* be Red Buttes—wavered strangely amidst the level expanse before. But he reached it. At least he thought that he reached it, and he fumbled at his saddle bags to loosen them.

Somebody rushed forward as if to meet him and help him; and he saw, lined plainly amidst the confused other countenances and figures, the astonished face of Billy.

"It's Red! Look out! He'll fall off!" Billy's voice rang like a trumpet.

"Where's the regular man?" they demanded.

"Tom's hurt—away back. I took his place. Quick, Billy! Go on. Election news. Lincoln's elected."

Billy vented an exclamation. He was into the saddle atop the saddle bags; he sprang away.

"Take good care of that kid," he called back. "He's a good one."

"You bet we will."

"Am I on time?" wheezed Davy, vaguely, unable to see straight.

"Two minutes ahead of time, lad."

Then they picked up Davy and carried him in, for he had fallen. He felt that he was entitled to fall. Besides, he could not have walked to save his life, now that he was done with the saddle bags.

XXIII

A BRUSH ON THE OVERLAND STAGE

Davy was so stiff and sore that for several days he moved around very little; but he learned that the news which he had brought in was being rushed westward at a tremendous rate. Billy Cody had ridden the last ten miles of his own run in thirty minutes; and by special rider from Julesburg the tidings “Lincoln’s elected!” had been taken into Denver only two days and twenty-one hours out of St. Joseph—665 miles.

When Davy was on his way back to Laramie he heard, at Horseshoe Station, that the news had been carried through to California in eight days—two days less than schedule! That was riding! And although he never again was on Pony Express, he felt that to the end of his life he would be proud of having ridden it once and of having performed well.

The people at Fort Laramie appreciated what Davy had done, and if he had not been a sensible boy the praise that he got would have turned his head. Captain Brown it was who summoned him over to the Brown quarters one evening and asked flatly:

“Dave, how would you like to go to West Point and be educated for a soldier?”

Dave gulped, in surprise, and blushed red. Such an education had been beyond his dreams.

“You have the right stuff in you, boy,” continued the captain, eyeing him. “You’ve made a good start, but you can’t continue knocking around this way. The frontier won’t last forever. When the telegraph comes through, connecting the West with the East, the Pony Express will have to quit; and there’ll soon be a railroad, and then the stage coach business will have to quit. If we have war (and

things look like it), I'll be ordered out; so will the other officers and men here, and what will happen to you is a problem. See? If you want to go to West Point you ought to begin preparing, so as to be ready when you're old enough to enter. It's no easy matter to take the course at the Academy; but it's the finest education in the world, even if you don't stay in the army. I don't want you to go there with the idea of being a fighting man. Army officers are the last persons of all to wish for fighting. The army has a great work to do outside of war. We're supposed to civilize the country and keep it peaceful. At West Point your body is built up, and what you learn, you learn thoroughly. You come out fit to meet every kind of emergency. What do you say? If you say 'yes,' then I'll make application for you to the President direct and ask him to appoint you 'at large,' as he has a right to do, just as if you were my own son."

"Yes, sir," stammered Davy, red. "I'd like to go."

"Good!" exclaimed the captain, shaking with him. "I'll make arrangements so that if I'm ordered out you'll be in the right hands."

Events seemed to occur fast. By Pony Express dispatches and the tissue newspapers it was learned that South Carolina had withdrawn from the Union and that the other Southern States were following suit. Abraham Lincoln in his inauguration address besought peace but stood firmly for a United States. His address was carried from Saint Joseph to Sacramento, 1966 miles, in seven days and seventeen hours—a new record. But when arrived the word that on April 12 the South Carolina troops had bombarded Fort Sumter, then everybody knew that the war had begun.

Another important thing, also, occurred. Before spring a stranger who created considerable talk came through by stage bound west. He was Mr. Edward Creighton—a pleasant gentleman with an Irish face; and was on his way to Salt Lake looking over the country with a view to putting in a telegraph line through to Salt Lake City. A California company was to build from California east to Salt Lake and it was rumored that the Government offered a payment of $40,000 a year to the company that reached Salt Lake the first. This

meant, of course, a line clear across from the Missouri to the Pacific coast.

In the hurly-burly of troops preparing to leave for the front in the East, Davy had the idea that he, too, should go as a drummer boy, maybe. The sight of Billy Cody hurrying through was hard to bear.

Billy appeared unexpectedly on the stage from Horseshoe Station, where he had been an “extra” rider under direct orders of Superintendent Jack Slade himself.

“Hello, Billy!”

“Hello, Dave.”

“Where are you going now, Billy?”

“Back home. I haven’t been home for a year, and my mother wants to see me. She’s poorly again. I guess I’d better be where things are boiling, too. This war won’t last more than six months, they say; but Kansas is liable to be a hot place with so many Southerners just across the border in Missouri. I ought to be on hand in case of trouble around home.”

That was just like Billy—to be on hand! Dave had more than half a mind to accompany him to Leavenworth, and Captain Brown, about to leave himself, had about decided that Leavenworth would be the best place, when the matter was solved by the appearance of the Reverend Mr. Baxter, who arrived on the next stage from the west.

“Gee whillikins!” exclaimed Dave, overjoyed, rushing to meet him. “What are *you* doing here?”

“Oh, merely coming through on my way from Salt Lake back to Denver,” laughed Mr. Baxter. “I’m messenger on the stage between Julesburg and Denver, but I’ve been off on a little vacation with a survey party for a new stage road. I heard you were here. You’re celebrated since you made that splendid ride, Davy.”

Davy blushed again. He hated to blush, but he had to.

“What are you doing these days?” demanded Mr. Baxter.

As soon as he heard of Davy's plans and present fix, he insisted that Davy travel down to Denver with him and stay there.

"Room with me, Dave?" he proffered generously. "I need a bunky. You can get work easy enough—I know the very place where they can use a boy who can write and figure—and I'll tutor you. It will do me good to brush up a little in mathematics and all that."

Captain Brown agreed, and the matter was promptly settled. Away went Dave, and the next day Captain Brown himself left for Fort Leavenworth, and then—where? His going would have made Laramie rather empty for Dave.

Denver had grown amazingly. There was now no "Auraria"; all was Denver City—and what had been known as "Western Kansas" and the "Territory of Jefferson," was the Territory of Colorado. On both sides of Cherry Creek many new buildings, two and three stories, some of the buildings being brick, had gone up; potatoes and other produce were being raised, and the streets, busier than ever, were thronged with merchants and other real citizens, as well as with miners and bull whackers.

Mr. Baxter took Davy over to see the lots that they had bought for the sack of flour two years before. Then, the lots had been out on the very edge of town; now they were right in the business district. The Jones family had not cared for them; had sold them for a mere song and had pushed on to "get rich quick" mining. The Joneses had gone back to the States, poor; but the lost lots were being held by the present owners at $1000 apiece.

Mr. Baxter made good his promise, and Dave found a niche (which appeared to have been made especially for a red-headed boy, with spunk, who could read and write as well as take care of himself on the trail) in the Elephant Corral. This was a large store building and yard for the convenience of merchants and overland traffic. It dealt in flour and feed and other staples consigned to it, and was headquarters for bull outfits arriving and leaving.

The war excitement continued. Colorado, like Kansas and Nebraska, sent out its volunteers in response to the calls of

President Lincoln. Mr. Baxter tried hard to be accepted as a chaplain, but the examining surgeons refused him, he confided to Davy, because he had a “bum lung.”

“So, Davy boy,” he said, “you and I will have to fight the battle of peace, and win our honors there, at present.”

They heard that Captain Brown had been made a general, and Billy Cody and Wild Bill, too, were serving on the Union side as scouts and despatch bearers in Kansas and Missouri. As for Davy, he pegged along, rooming and boarding with Mr. Baxter, doing his work at the Elephant Corral and studying evenings.

Meanwhile, the staging and freighting across the plains and to Salt Lake continued, when not interrupted by the Indians. The Butterfield “Southern Overland,” through Texas and New Mexico and Arizona to California, which had been carrying the Government mail for two years, had to be discontinued on account of the war and the Apache Indians; and the contract was given to the “Central” route, operated by Russell, Majors & Waddell. This meant $400,000 a year from the Government, and it looked as though the Central Overland, California & Pike’s Peak need no longer be called the “Clean Out of Cash & Poor Pay”; but soon the word came that the whole line had been bought in by a big creditor, Ben Holladay.

Great things were expected of Ben Holladay. Dave had seen him once or twice—a large, heavy man, with square, resolute face; clean-shaven cheeks, and gray beard. He was a veteran freighter and trader on the plains, and had been in business in Salt Lake, California, St. Louis and New York, and was a hustler. He hastened to increase the service of his stage line. No expense or trouble was too much for him. The line was known now as “Ben Holladay’s Line,” and “The Overland Stage.” The old route north from Julesburg and around by Fort Laramie was changed to a shorter route (the route which Mr. Baxter had helped survey for Russell, Majors & Waddell at the time when he picked up Dave at Laramie), which from Latham, sixty miles north of Denver, veering northwest crossed the mountains at Bridger’s Pass for Salt Lake. At Salt Lake the celebrated Pioneer

Stage Line continued with passengers and mail and express for Placerville, California.

The very fall after Dave arrived in Denver Mr. Creighton finished his telegraph line into Salt Lake City, and won the $40,000 a year prize offered by the Government. The California company met him there; the first message was flashed through from coast to coast ("The Pacific to the Atlantic sends greeting," it said; "and may both oceans be dry before a foot of all the land that lies between shall belong to any other than a united country"); and, as Captain Brown had predicted, the Pony Express must stop. The Holladay stages carried the mails.

Every morning at eight o'clock sharp they left Atchison below St. Joseph on the Missouri River; at Latham the Salt Lake coaches proceeded on to Salt Lake and the Denver coaches turned south to Denver—and usually got in with such regularity that Denver people set their watches by them! There never had been such a stage coach magnate as Ben Holladay. His six- and nine-passenger Concord coaches were the best that could be built—and on the main line alone he used 100. His horses were the best that could be bought—and of these and of mules he had, on the main line, 3000. His drivers were paid the best salaries—$125 and $150 a month. And for carrying the mails he received from the Government $650,000 a year. When, several times a year, he went over his whole lines he travelled like a whirlwind and caused a tremendous commotion.

But speedily the regular operation of the Holladay Overland Express was badly interrupted, for the Indians began to ravage up and down. All the way from central Kansas to the mountains they destroyed stations and attacked stages. The stages ran two at a time, for company, and were protected by squads of soldiers; but even then they did not always get through, and Denver was cut off from the outside world for weeks at a time. Whenever Mr. Baxter started out as messenger Dave was afraid that he would not come back alive; but somehow he managed to make the trip, although he was apt to return in a coach riddled with arrows and bullets.

The summer of 1864, when Davy was almost seventeen and old enough to enter the Military Academy, was the worst season of all for Indian raids. Stations and ranches for hundreds of miles at a stretch were pillaged, and the stages ceased altogether between the mountains and the Missouri. Then, in the fall, there came a lull—of which Dave was heartily glad, for he had been ordered to report at Fort Leavenworth for examination. His appointment had come, signed by Abraham Lincoln.

“I’ll see you through to Atchison, Dave,” said Mr. Baxter; “and to Leavenworth, too. The return trip will be my last run.”

“Why so, Ben?” asked Davy, astonished.

“Because I’m going to change to a more permanent business while I can. The railways are coming. The Central Pacific’s building a little every year east out of California, and as soon as the war’s over the Union Pacific will start from its end, at the Missouri. When the two roads meet, with trains running across the continent, this staging business will be knocked flat, and we messengers will be stranded. I’ve got my health now; I’m as good a man as anybody, and when I get back from Atchison I’ll go into something different. I’ve several offers pending. See?”

That sounded like sense; but Dave was pleased that Mr. Baxter had not quit before this trip, for he had counted on going out in Ben’s coach.

The fare from Denver to the Missouri River was up to $175, but Davy had saved this, and more. The stages left from the Planters’ Hotel. The first stage out, after the long interruption, created much excitement. At least fifty passengers clamored for places, but there was room for only nine in the body—and even they were crowded by mail sacks. Dave sat on the driver’s box with Ben and the driver, who was Bob Hodge.

Everybody on the line knew Bob Hodge; he was one of the “king whips,” and very popular. The Holladay stage drivers out of the principal stations dressed the best that they could, for they were persons of consequence. Polished boots, broadcloth trousers tucked

in, soft silk shirts with diamond stud, rakish hat and kid gloves were none too good for them. Bob wore a suit of buckskin—with its decorations of beads and fringes, the finest suit in Denver. As he stepped from the hotel he elegantly drew on a pair of new yellow kid gloves. He nodded to Ben and Dave, and tucked a brass horn, which was his pride, in the seat. On this horn he was accustomed to perform when he wanted amusement and when he approached stations. His other pride was his whip—of ebony handle inlaid with silver. All the Holladay stage drivers owned their whips and would not lend them.

Bob climbed aboard, Ben and Dave followed. Two hostlers held the six-horse team by the bits; another handed up the lines to Bob—who condescended to receive them.

“Think she’ll get through, Bob?” queried several voices, referring to the coach.

“Oh, I reckon. She’s been through several times before,” drawled Bob.

And by the looks of “her,” she evidently had been through something. It had been a beautiful coach, in the beginning, painted a glossy bright green, trimmed with gilt; but now it was scarred by storm and Indians. The very boot curtain behind Dave’s feet was punctured in two places by arrows, and there were other holes through the coach sides.

Bob glanced at his gold watch. He grasped lines and whip, nodded at the hostlers (they sprang from the leaders’ bits), released the heavy brake with a bang; to the crack of his whip forward leaped the six gray horses, whose harness was adorned with ivory rings. The watching crowd gave a cheer, and, driving with one hand, Bob played what he called “Into the Wilderness.”

Bob’s run was only to Latham, sixty miles down the Platte. Here he descended, in lordly fashion, from his seat—and out of the coach must issue the passengers, much to their disgust. The mails from the west had been piling up for six weeks, and were of more importance than people. Forty-one sacks were stored aboard by the station

agent, until the coach was heaped to the roof, and the big boot was overflowing. The coach now carried a ton of mail—and Ben, Davy and the driver.

Express messengers rode an entire division, such as between Atchison and Denver, between Denver and Salt Lake, and between Salt Lake and Placerville of California. So Ben continued on, with Dave as his guest. The new driver was “Long Slim”—another odd character. “Long Slim” was six feet three inches tall, and so thin that he claimed when he stood sideways he wouldn’t cast a shadow. He was much different from dandy Bob Hodge; for he wore cowhide boots, a blue army overcoat, and a buffalo fur cap.

Long Slim drove to Bijou Station, and here another driver took charge. Stage drivers drove forty or fifty miles, or from “home” station to “home” station. In between, about every ten miles, were the “swing” stations, where the teams were changed. Meals were served at the home stations.

The change of drivers was interesting, and really made little difference to Dave, for none of them talked much; and as the coach rolled further eastward into the Indian country the talk was less and less. At the swing stations the teams were always standing, harnessed and waiting. The driver grandly tossed down the lines and yawned; the old team was whisked out in a jiffy, the new team trotted into place without being told, the station men handed up the lines to the box, and away went the stage again.

At the home stations the driver—“Long Slim,” or “Deacon,” or “Dad,” or “Mizzou,” or whatever he was called, followed his lines to the ground, said (if he chose): “All quiet so far, Hank,” and strolled into the station. If he mentioned a drink of water, half the station force rushed to get it for him. He was a king, was the driver on the Overland Stage!

At Bijou Station, six soldiers of the Colorado cavalry picked up the stage and escorted it, riding three on a side, for about 100 miles. At least they were there when Davy peeked out of the boot under the driver’s seat, where he slept, curled in a ball, very comfortably, while the coach rocked and swayed through the night.

The Seventh Iowa Cavalry next took the stage, galloping and trotting beside it down the trail along the Platte River.

The stage stations and the ranches looked as if they had been having a tough time. Most of the ranch buildings were in ruins and abandoned; many of the stage stations had been burned, and the station men were living in dug-outs, some of which were merely holes in the ground, roofed over with a pile of dirt loop-holed for rifles. Meals at the home stations were $1.50, cooked by the station agents' brave wives or by the men themselves. Some of the meals were very poor, too—and some astonishingly good.

All went well with the stage until between Cottonwood and Fort Kearney the driver, who was known as "Waupsie," pointed to the south with his whip.

"There they are," he said quietly; and instantly flung out his lash.

The silken snapper cracked like a pistol shot, and out launched the team. Down from a low row of sandy buttes half a mile to the south and ahead were speeding a bevy of dark dots. Davy's heart skipped a beat. The dots were making for the trail, as if to cut off the coach. They were Indians, sure.

"What'll we do, Waupsie?" asked Ben, coolly. "Beat 'em in?"

"We'll do the best we can. Six miles to go is all," answered Waupsie, in grim manner. And he yelled to the cavalrymen: "You'll have to ride faster than that, boys."

The corporal in charge of the squad had spoken gruffly. Three before, three behind, the soldiers were rising and falling in their stirrups and urging on their horses. The grade was slightly down hill, and it was evident that the cavalry horses were no match for the stage team—six splendid blacks, grain fed and long-legged. Soon the coach gradually drew even with the leading soldiers and began to pass them in spite of their efforts.

"Can't wait," yelled Waupsie, "Goodby. Fact is," he remarked, half to himself, "I can't hold 'em. Drat their skins!"

The whoops of the Indians were plainly heard; the breeze was from the south, and as if smelling the red enemy the stage horses were wild with fear. Braced, Waupsie sawed on the lines; his foot pressed the brake hard, but he might as well have saved his strength.

Waupsie had no time or opportunity to use a gun; his business was to drive. Ben cocked his shot-gun lying across his knees.

“Get in the boot, Dave,” he bade.

Davy started to slide under, but stopped ashamed. In a rush the Indians, whooping and frantically brandishing bows and lances, charged the trail, cutting in behind, and racing on both sides before. The cavalry squad were now far in the rear.

With a thud an arrow landed full in the coach side; another quivered in the flank of the off wheel horse—and he leaped prodigiously.

“Steady! Steady, boys!” besought Waupsie.

The arrows were hissing and thudding. The painted Indians looked like demons. Ben flung up his gun, took hasty aim, and at the report the nearest Indian on the left (a particularly determined fellow) swerved away, reeling in his saddle pad. Red spots could be seen on his side where the buck-shot had struck. At the rear the cavalrymen were shooting vainly, and suddenly Waupsie gave an exclamation.

“Take these lines, quick!” he said. “Confound it!”

An arrow had pinned his right arm to his side. He jerked at it and could not budge it, and Ben grabbed the lines.

“You take my gun, Dave,” he ordered. “Don’t shoot unless you have to; and then shoot the ponies. Fight ’em off.”

Dave promptly seized the gun from Ben’s lap, and at once he saw the reason in the last order. The Indians were racing on either side; whenever he raised the gun to aim every Indian on that side ducked to the opposite flank of his horse, and left only a moccasin sole in sight. That was a small mark at which to aim from a jolting coach.

Dave aimed and aimed again; whenever he paused, up bobbed the Indians; when he pointed the gun at them, down they ducked; and all the time they were shooting from underneath their ponies' necks or from the saddle.

"That's right. Fight 'em off, Davy. It's as good as emptying your gun," panted Ben, hanging hard to the lines. Waupsie was plying the whip—now and then to drop it and level his revolver.

"THAT'S RIGHT. FIGHT 'EM OFF, DAVY"

"Fight 'em off, Davy!"

A sharp shock almost paralyzed Dave's right arm, and through shoulder and arm surged a red-hot pain. He nearly dropped the gun. He glanced at his shoulder and saw a flush of crimson dyeing his shirt. But no arrow was sticking there as he had feared. It was only a gash. All right.

"Hurt, Dave?" queried Ben.

"No, not much," said Davy, firmly.

"We'll make it," uttered Waupsie. "Got to. Fight 'em off, boys!"

The sandy plain flowed past; another horse had been wounded and the coach was fairly bristling with shafts. But the gallant team never slackened their furious pace, and suddenly with a final chorus of whoops and a last volley, the Indians turned and raced away; for yonder, around the turn, appeared the home station.

"Humph!" muttered Waupsie. "Those Injuns are just on a lark. Now I'll get quit of this arrow."

The cavalry squad did not arrive until after the coach had left; another squad escorted it to Fort Kearney, and by the time Atchison was reached, two days afterward, Dave's shoulder was beginning to heal.

"It doesn't hurt much, really, Ben," he insisted; but he was proud of his wound. The scar he carries to-day and other scars besides.

From Atchison he and Ben went down to Leavenworth. On the street at Leavenworth a hand clapped him on his shoulder

(fortunately his well shoulder), and looking up he looked into the face of Billy Cody.

XXIV

BUFFALO BILL IS CHAMPION

It was not “Little Billy Cody” now—the slender boy whose boots had seemed too large for him even when he was riding Pony Express. It was “Scout Cody”—a man with wide, piercing brown eyes, long wavy yellow hair, a silky light-brown moustache, a pair of broad shoulders above a wiry waist, and an alert, springy step. But he was “Billy Cody” after all.

He and Wild Bill Hickok had been serving together with the Union army in Missouri and Arkansas; and now he was at Leavenworth on a furlough from detached duty at St. Louis.

He could give Davy only a half hour; Davy heard some of his adventures and learned also that “Mother Cody” had gone (what a brave, sweet woman she had been!), and that the Cody home in Salt Creek Valley had been broken up. Truly, the West was undergoing great changes.

Greater changes still occurred in the next three years. Dave entered West Point in June of the next summer, 1865, and for the succeeding two years he studied hard. When he was given his furlough he spent part of it with General Brown, who, luckily, was stationed at Fort Leavenworth.

The two years at the Military Academy had formed a different boy of Dave. The strict discipline had taught him how to make the most of his time, and the constant drill exercises had straightened him up and trained all his muscles as well as his mind. He felt quite like a man as he shook hands with the general and met his approving eye.

One of his first questions to the general, after the greetings and polite inquiries, was about Billy Cody.

"'Billy' Cody, you say?" laughed the general. "Haven't you been reading the papers?"

"I'm afraid I haven't, general," confessed Dave. "We don't have much time to read the papers at the Academy, you know."

"That's so," chuckled the general. "You don't. But your friend and mine, Billy Cody, has a new name. He's now 'Buffalo Bill.' He's been supplying buffalo meat to the grading contractors on the Kansas Pacific. They need about twelve buffalo a day, and he took the job for $500 a month. It's been a dangerous business, and he hunts alone out on the plains, with one man following in a wagon to do the butchering and load the meat, and the Indians are always trying to get Bill's scalp. So far he's outwitted them, and he's been bringing in the meat so regularly that at night when he rides in the boys in the camps yell: 'Here comes old Bill with more buffalo!' and 'Buffalo Bill' he is. He's been married, too, you know."

"Oh, has he?" And Dave spoke impulsively. "I'd like to see him mighty well."

"You can. The railroad's running trains about 500 miles west from the river, nearly to Sheridan, and you've got here just in time to go along with us and see a big contest between Buffalo Bill and Billy Comstock, the chief of scouts at Fort Wallace there. They're to hunt buffalo together for eight hours, and the one who kills the most wins a nice little purse of $500, gold. Billy Comstock is a fine young fellow, a great hunter and a crack shot—but I'll back Buffalo Bill."

So, thought Dave, loyally, would he, too.

The contest had excited great interest. An excursion for friends of the rivals and for sight-seers was to be run clear through from St. Louis. Every army officer and soldier who could leave was going from Fort Leavenworth. Leader of all was General George A. Custer, the famous "Boy General with the Golden Locks" (as during the war the newspapers had called him), who with his fighting Seventh Cavalry had arrived at Fort Leavenworth after a summer's campaign on the plains. Of course, everybody in army circles knew about General Custer, the dashing cavalryman, with his curling yellow hair

and his crimson tie. Introduced to him by General Brown, Dave blushed and stammered and felt that he must cut a very poor figure.

It seemed strange that a railroad actually was on its way across the plains. In fact, there were two railroads jutting out from the Missouri River for the farther West. Northward from Omaha the celebrated Union Pacific had built clear to Julesburg, and was hustling along to Utah at the rate of five and six miles a day. It followed the old Overland Trail up the Platte, and ate the stages as it progressed.

Here at the southward the Kansas Pacific, or “Eastern Division” of the Union Pacific, was reaching westward out of Leavenworth for Denver. It followed the Smoky Hill Fork Trail taken by the Hee-Haw Express—the memorable outfit of Dave’s and Billy’s and Mr. Baxter’s, and all, to the “Pike’s Peak Country” and the “Cherry Creek diggin’s.” Yes, it did seem strange to Dave to be riding that trail in a train of cars drawn by a snorting steam-engine and crowded with laughing, shouting people—travelling in an hour a distance that would have required from the Hee-Haw Express a day, perhaps! But the Hee-Haw Express had not been such a bad experience after all, and it had been fun as well as work.

Gracious, how Kansas had settled! The Salt Creek Valley, people said, was all taken up by farms. The railroad route from Leavenworth down to the Kansas River at Lawrence certainly passed through nothing but farms and settlements, and on up the Kansas to the Smoky Hill Fork at Junction City all the country was farms, farms, farms, punctuated by towns and cities.

Along the Smoky Hill Fork trail a number of new forts had been established, protecting the way for the railroad. First beyond Fort Riley, which Davy remembered from the time when the Hee-Haws passed it, was Fort Harker, next would come Fort Hays, and then Fort Wallace near Sheridan.

The train left Leavenworth early in the morning; the run to the end of the track would take about twenty-five hours, with stops for meals. It would appear, from the looks of the country between Lawrence and Junction City across the river from Fort Riley, that there were no

more wild Indians and buffalo; but westward from Junction City things suddenly changed; and when Dave awakened from a brief doze here were the same old brown plains again, ready for the bull whacker, the stage coach, the buffalo and the Indians.

The train was jammed with all kinds of people from St. Louis, Kansas City, Leavenworth, Lawrence, Topeka—everybody having a good time. In the last car were Mrs. Cody and little daughter Arta. Davy had a glimpse of her—a handsome woman with glowing dark eyes. Buffalo Bill had met her during the war, in St. Louis, and they had been married two years now. She and little Arta and General Custer were the main attraction on the whole train.

The train was a travelling arsenal. At the front end of Davy's car was a stand containing twenty-five breech-loading rifles and a large chest of cartridges, with the lid opened. The conductor (who, people said, was an old Indian fighter) wore two revolvers at his waist, and carried his rifle from car to car. Almost every man was armed with some sort of a gun, and all the passengers and train crew were constantly on the lookout for "Injuns" and buffalo. As the train roared onward further into the plains, its snorty, busy little engine sounded five short whistles. Out from the windows down the line of coaches were thrust heads. Men who had no gun made a rush for the stand of arms, and grabbed rifles and cartridges.

"Buffalo! Buffalo!"

"Where? Quick!"

"There they go!"

"Where? Oh, I see them!"

"Mercy, what monsters!"

There were people aboard who actually never had seen a buffalo.

"What beards!"

"Are those really buffalo?"

"Shoot!"

"Conductor! Stop the train!"

Bang! Bangity-bang! Bang! Bang! Everybody who could get a glimpse poked his gun out of a window and fired. Two big buffalo bulls were racing the train; heads down, tails up, trying to cross in front of it. The rain of bullets had not touched them. One crossed; but the other suddenly whirled on the track and charged the engine. The cow-catcher lifted him high—Davy had sight of his great shaggy shape turning a somersault in the air, and funny enough he looked, too, with mane and tail flying. He landed with a thump; people laughed so that they forgot to shoot again until too late; and gazing back Davy was glad to witness him scramble to his feet, shake himself, and glare after the train and bellow defiance.

It struck Dave as rather of a shame to pepper the buffalo from the windows of a moving train—which, he heard, sometimes did not even stop to make use of the meat, but left the carcasses lying for the wolves. Dusk soon settled, so that there was little more shooting. With a stop for water and supper, on through the darkness rumbled the train. The passengers slept in their seats—an uncomfortable way, but they did not mind. Judging from the looks of Forts Harker and Hays, which were merely log cabins with sod roofs, the cars were the best place.

The talk among the passengers was mainly of buffalo and of the Indians (who had been fighting the advance of the railroad through their hunting-grounds), and of the match between Buffalo Bill Cody and Scout Will Comstock.

As for Will Comstock, the people said that he was a young fellow with the figure of a mere boy and the face of a girl—but that no braver scout ever rode the plains. However, Billy Cody seemed to have the majority. He had been making a great record since the war. He had driven stage for a little while on the Overland Trail; then he had married; and soon he was scouting again for the army on the Smoky Hill Trail. He had guided General Custer on a dangerous trip out of Fort Harker, and had been guide and dispatch bearer out of Fort Hays, and nobody except Wild Bill (who was a scout on this line, too) was thought to be quite his equal.

Almost as famous as Buffalo Bill were his buffalo horse, Brigham, and his rifle, Lucretia; against these three Billy Comstock, good as he was, did not stand much show.

It was a jolly excursion crowd this: soldiers and civilians, city people and country people, residents and tourists, men, women and some children, all packed tight and bent on seeing the “big match” advertised to take place between Buffalo Bill Cody and Will Comstock, the other famous scout.

Early in the morning the tracks ended about twenty miles this side of Sheridan. And here, on the open prairie, were gathered an astonishing amount of vehicles, animals and horsemen. The spot looked like a land opening—or a picnic. Davy recognized Billy Cody at once.

With a group of army officers, scouts in buckskin, and other horsemen, Billy was sitting on his horse at the edge of the mass of carriages. The train-load of excursionists fairly burst from the cars, even climbing out through the windows, and made a rush for the vehicles. Davy forged ahead for Billy Cody. Billy had left his horse and when Davy saw him next he was gallantly escorting his wife and little daughter to an army ambulance; as he came back Dave caught him.

“Hello, Billy.”

“By thunder! That name sounds familiar, Dave! Well, I’m certainly glad to see you.”

They gripped hands. As Buffalo Bill, Billy looked older than he had as Scout Cody, even, during the war. His face had been bronzed deeper by hard plains riding, day and night, and on his firm chin he wore a little goatee. His suit of Indian tanned buckskin was beaded and fringed, and fitted him to perfection. A fine figure of a man he was, too; every inch of him.

There was little time to exchange greetings or words. Everything was confusion—and the day would soon pass.

“Go in and win, Billy.”

“You bet I will, Dave.”

And with that Billy strode hastily back to his horse—brushing by the many hands held out to stay him a moment.

The match was to last from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon if buffalo could be found. Slim and active, and as picturesque as Buffalo Bill himself, General Custer, from horseback, announced in a loud voice that the spectators were to follow the hunters until the herd was sighted and then must stay behind so as not to alarm the buffalo, until the shooting had begun. After that they might go as near as they pleased.

Buffalo Bill and Scout Comstock led away; behind them rode the horsemen, chiefly scouts and army officers. A large bunch of cavalry mounts had been sent out from Fort Wallace, near Sheridan, for the visitor officers, and Davy (who was almost an officer) was accorded the courtesy of one. So he was well fixed. Trailing the horsemen came the excursionists in army ambulances and old coaches and spring wagons and even buggies—raked and scraped from far and near.

Thus they all proceeded across the rolling prairie. The scene resembled a picnic more than ever.

Buffalo Bill, the talk said, was riding Brigham, his favorite buffalo runner—and a scrubby looking horse Brigham was, too, for a hunter and a racer. Billy’s gun was a heavy, long-barrelled single-shot—a breech-loading Springfield army gun of fifty calibre.

Will Comstock was apparently much better mounted and better armed. His horse was a strong, active, spirited black, and his gun was a Henry repeating carbine. He himself seemed a young fellow to be chief of scouts at Fort Wallace; his face was smooth and fair, his eyes roundly blue, and his waist was as small as a girl’s.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill raised his hand; and at the instant a hum of excitement welled from the crowd. There were some buffalo—there, about a mile ahead on the right, a good-sized herd, peacefully grazing. Away sped Buffalo Bill and Scout Comstock and two other

horsemen, to get to the windward. The two other horsemen were the referees, one to accompany each hunter and keep tab on him.

The rest of the crowd followed slowly, so as to give the hunters plenty of time to begin.

On and on spurred the group of four. They swerved for the buffalo herd; and separating, as if by agreement, into pairs, dashed into the herd that way—Buffalo Bill and his referee on the right, Scout Comstock and his referee on the left. As soon as the first shot echoed back across the prairie, the cry went up: “They’re in! They’re in!” and wildly excited, straight for the field broke the eager spectators.

The wagons jounced and bounded, the horses and mules snorted, women screamed, men shouted—and better equipped than those other excursionists, on horseback amidst his army friends Davy forged to the front.

When they arrived the contest was well under way. Scout Comstock had ridden almost out of sight, pelting along and shooting into the rear of his bunch. He had left a trail of dead buffalo, as if he had made every shot count. Buffalo Bill, however, was right here, working by a different system. Evidently he had hastened to the head of his bunch first, and turned them—until now he had them all actually running in a small circle. He was riding around the outside at an easy lope on Brigham, and steadily firing, oftentimes without raising his gun from across the saddle horn.

Brigham’s bridle lines were hanging loose. He needed no guiding. He knew just what was to be done. He loped to the side of a buffalo and stayed there a moment until the gun went “Bang!” Then, even before the buffalo had fallen, he loped on to another, put his master in good position, and at the report of the rifle continued to the next!

“A wonderful horse! A wonderful horse!” ejaculated General Brown. “Why, teach that horse to shoot and he wouldn’t need a rider. Bill could sit and look on!”

“He nurses the buffalo together and all Bill has to do is to load and fire. He scarcely needs to aim,” said another officer.

Presently Buffalo Bill had shot down every buffalo in the bunch; there were thirty-eight, dead as doornails. When Bill Comstock returned, his horse blown, from chasing his bunch as far as he could, his referee reported twenty-three as that count.

The horses were rested until another herd appeared. Out of this Buffalo Bill killed eighteen with the help of old Brigham, and Billy Comstock killed fourteen. So at noon the score stood: Buffalo Bill (and Brigham), fifty-six; Billy Comstock only thirty-seven.

Luncheon was spread out on the prairie by the excursionists and everybody ate. The opinion was that Buffalo Bill had won; Billy Comstock never could catch up—not even if they traded horses!

After luncheon Buffalo Bill suddenly stood, and, going to Brigham, quickly stripped him of saddle and bridle.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” announced Billy, “in order to give my friend Comstock a chance I’m going to finish my hunt without saddle and bridle—and even then I’ll wager I’ll down more buffalo than he will.”

“Oh, Mr. Cody! Please don’t!” begged one of the women excursionists, who had been nervous all along. “You’ll certainly be hurt.”

Buffalo Bill smiled and shook his head.

“There’s not the slightest cause for alarm,” he said. “I’ve ridden this way many a time. Old Brigham knows as well as I what’s to be done—and sometimes a great deal better.”

Riding thus without saddle and bridle, out of the next herd Buffalo Bill, so cleverly guided by Brigham, easily killed thirteen more buffaloes. The last he drove with a rush straight toward the spectators, and laughed as he downed it almost at their feet. Slipping from his bareback seat, he doffed his hat and bowed.

“You see?” he bade.

Scout Comstock came in with a count of only nine.

“I’m done,” he said frankly. “How many in all, Bill?”

“Sixty-nine.”

“Forty-six here.” And he shrugged his slender shoulders. “Well, Bill, you’re a wonder. There’s not another man on the plains could have done it. Ladies and gentlemen,” he called, “three cheers for Buffalo Bill Cody, the boy ‘extra,’ the kid express rider, the champion buffalo hunter, and the best man that ever rode the plains.”

The excursion train returned that night, and Davy returned with it. But Buffalo Bill stayed out on the plains, scouting for the army against the Indians. Davy kept track of him, for the name of “Buffalo Bill,” dispatch bearer and guide, was constantly in the papers. When in June, 1869, Davy graduated from the Military Academy, and soon was assigned to the Fifth Cavalry in Nebraska, Buffalo Bill had been appointed by General Phil Sheridan as chief of scouts to serve with it.

This spring the Union Pacific Railway had met the Central Pacific Railway in Utah and the tracks joined. The Overland Trail had been spanned at last by iron rails; but there was still much work to be done to make the plains safe for the settler, his home, his church and his school-house; and helping to do it, Dave and Buffalo Bill often rode together, man and man.

Transcriber’s Notes:

Except for the frontispiece and portrait, illustrations have been moved to follow the text that they illustrate, so the page number of the illustration may not match the page number in the Illustrations.

Printer’s, punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

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