

**LAST OF THE GREAT SCOUTS**

**BY**

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## Preface

In presenting this volume to the public the writer has a twofold purpose. For a number of years there has been an increasing demand for an authentic biography of "Buffalo Bill," and in response, many books of varying value have been submitted; yet no one of them has borne the hall-mark of veracious history. Naturally, there were incidents in Colonel Cody's life-- more especially in the earlier years--that could be given only by those with whom he had grown up from childhood. For many incidents of his later life I am indebted to his own and others' accounts. I desire to acknowledge obligation to General P. H. Sheridan, Colonel Inman, Colonel Ingraham, and my brother for valuable assistance furnished by Sheridan's Memoirs, "The Santa Fe Trail," "The Great Salt Lake Trail," "Buffalo Bill's Autobiography," and "Stories from the Life of Buffalo Bill."

A second reason that prompted the writing of my brother's life-story is purely personal. The sobriquet of "Buffalo Bill" has conveyed to many people an impression of his personality that is far removed from the facts. They have pictured in fancy a rough frontier character, without tenderness and true nobility. But in very truth has the poet sung:

"The bravest are the tenderest--  
The loving are the daring."

The public knows my brother as boy Indian-slayer, a champion buffalo-hunter, a brave soldier, a daring scout, an intrepid frontiersman, and a famous exhibitor. It is only fair to him that a glimpse be given of the parts he played behind the scenes--devotion to a widowed mother, that pushed the boy so early upon a stage of ceaseless action, continued care and tenderness displayed in later years, and the generous thoughtfulness of manhood's prime.

Thus a part of my pleasant task has been to enable the public to see my brother through his sister's eyes--eyes that have seen truly if kindly. If I have been tempted into praise where simple narrative might to the reader seem all that was required, if I have seemed to exaggerate in any of my history's details, I may say that I am not conscious of having set down more than "a plain, unvarnished tale." Embarrassed with riches of fact, I have had no thought of fiction. H. C. W.

CODYVIEW, DULUTH, MINNESOTA, February 26, 1899.

## The Old Homestead In Iowa

A PLEASANT, roomy farm-house, set in the sunlight against a background of cool, green wood and mottled meadow-- this is the picture that my earliest memories frame for me. To this home my parents, Isaac and Mary Cody, had moved soon after their marriage.

The place was known as the Scott farm, and was situated in Scott County, Iowa, near the historic little town of Le Clair, where, but a few years before, a village of the Fox Indians had been located; where Black Hawk and his thousand warriors had assembled for their last war-dance; where the marquee of General Scott was erected, and the treaty with the Sacs and Foxes drawn up; and where, in obedience to the Sac chief's terms, Antoine Le Clair, the famous half-breed Indian scholar and interpreter, had built his cabin, and given to the place his name. Here, in this atmosphere of pioneer struggle and Indian warfare--in the farm-house in the dancing sunshine, with the background of wood and meadow--my brother, William Frederick Cody, was born, on the 26th day of February, 1846.

Of the good, old-fashioned sort was our family, numbering five daughters and two sons--Martha, Samuel, Julia, William, Eliza, Helen, and May. Samuel, a lad of unusual beauty of face and nature, was killed through an unhappy accident before he was yet fourteen.

He was riding "Betsy Baker," a mare well known among old settlers in Iowa as one of speed and pedigree, yet displaying at times a most malevolent temper, accompanied by Will, who, though only seven years of age, yet sat his pony with the ease and grace that distinguished the veteran rider of the future. Presently Betsy Baker became fractious, and sought to throw her rider. In vain did she rear and plunge; he kept his saddle. Then, seemingly, she gave up the fight, and Samuel cried, in boyish exultation:

"Ah, Betsy Baker, you didn't quite come it that time!"

His last words! As if she knew her rider was a careless victor off his guard, the mare reared suddenly and flung herself upon her back, crushing the daring boy beneath her.

Though to us younger children our brother Samuel was but a shadowy memory, in him had centered our parents' fondest hopes and aims. These, naturally, were transferred to the younger, now the only son, and the hope that mother, especially, held for him was strangely stimulated by the remembrance of the mystic divination of a soothsayer in the years ago. My mother was a woman of too much intelligence and force of character to nourish an average superstition; but prophecies fulfilled will temper, though they may not shake, the smiling unbelief of the most hard-headed skeptic. Mother's moderate skepticism was not proof against the strange fulfillment of one prophecy, which fell out in this wise:

To a Southern city, which my mother visited when a girl, there came a celebrated fortune-teller, and led by curiosity, my mother and my aunt one day made two of the crowd that thronged the sibyl's drawing-rooms.

Both received with laughing incredulity the prophecy that my aunt and the two children with her would be dead in a fortnight; but the dread augury was fulfilled to the letter. All three were stricken with yellow fever, and died within less than the time set. This startling confirmation of the soothsayer's divining powers not unnaturally affected my mother's belief in that part of the prophecy relating to herself that "she would meet her future husband on the steamboat by which she expected to return home; that she would be married to him in a year, and bear three sons, of whom only the second would live, but that the name of this son would be known all over the world, and would one day be that of the President of the United States." The first part of this prophecy was verified, and Samuel's death was another link in the curious chain of circumstances. Was it, then, strange that mother looked with unusual hope upon her second son?

That 'tis good fortune for a boy to be only brother to five sisters is open to question. The older girls petted Will; the younger regarded him as a superior being; while to all it seemed so fit and proper that the promise of the stars concerning his future should be fulfilled that never for a moment did we weaken in our belief that great things were in store for our only brother. We looked for the prophecy's complete fulfillment, and with childish veneration regarded Will as one destined to sit in the executive's chair.

My mother, always somewhat delicate, was so affected in health by the shock of Samuel's death that a change of scene was advised. The California gold craze was then at its height, and father caught the fever, though in a mild form; for he had prospered as a farmer, and we not only had a comfortable home, but were in easy circumstances. Influenced in part by a desire to improve mother's health, and in part, no doubt, by the golden day-dreams that lured so many Argonauts Pacificward, he disposed of his farm, and bade us prepare for a Western journey. Before his plans were completed he fell in with certain disappointed gold-seekers returning from the Coast, and impressed by their representations, decided in favor of Kansas instead of California.

Father had very extravagant ideas regarding vehicles and horses, and such a passion for equestrian display, that we often found ourselves with a stable full of thoroughbreds and an empty cupboard. For our Western migration we had, in addition to three prairie-schooners, a large family carriage, drawn by a span of fine horses in silver-mounted harness. This carriage had been made to order in the East, upholstered in the finest leather, polished and varnished as though for a royal progress. Mother and we girls found it more comfortable riding than the springless prairie-schooners.

Brother Will constituted himself an armed escort, and rode proudly alongside on his pony, his gun slung across the pommel of his saddle, and the dog Turk bringing up the rear.

To him this Western trip thrilled with possible Indian skirmishes and other stirring adventures, though of the real dangers that lay in our path he did not dream. For him, therefore, the first week of our travels held no great interest, for we were constantly chancing upon settlers and farm-houses, in which the night might be passed; but with every mile the settlers grew fewer and farther between; until one day Will whispered to us, in great glee: "I heard father tell mother that he expected we should have to camp to-night. Now we'll have some fun!"

Will's hope was well founded. Shortly before nightfall we reached a stream that demanded a ferry-boat for its crossing, and as the nearest dwelling was a dozen miles away, it was decided that we should camp by the stream-side. The family was first sent across the ferry, and upon the eight-year-old lad of the house father placed the responsibility of selecting the ground on which to pitch the tents.

My brother's career forcibly illustrates the fact that environment plays as large a part as heredity in shaping character. Perhaps his love for the free life of the plains is a heritage derived from some long-gone ancestor; but there can be no doubt that to the earlier experiences of which I am writing he owed his ability as a scout. The faculty for obtaining water, striking trails, and finding desirable camping-grounds in him seemed almost instinct.

The tents being pitched upon a satisfactory site, Will called to Turk, the dog, and rifle in hand, set forth in search of game for supper. He was successful beyond his fondest hopes. He had looked only for small game, but scarcely had he put the camp behind him when Turk gave a signaling yelp, and out of the bushes bounded a magnificent deer. Nearly every hunter will confess to "buck fever" at sight of his first deer, so it is not strange that a boy of Will's age should have stood immovable, staring dazedly at the graceful animal until it vanished from sight. Turk gave chase, but soon trotted back, and barked reproachfully at his young master. But Will presently had an opportunity to recover Turk's good opinion, for the dog, after darting away, with another signaling yelp fetched another fine stag within gun range. This time the young hunter, mastering his nerves, took aim with steady hand, and brought down his first deer.

On the following Sabbath we were encamped by another deep, swift-running stream. After being wearied and overheated by a rabbit chase, Turk attempted to swim across this little river, but was chilled, and would have perished had not Will rushed to the rescue. The ferryman saw the boy struggling with the dog in the water, and started after him with his boat. But Will reached the bank without assistance.

"I've hearn of dogs saving children, but this is the first time I ever hearn of a child saving a dog from drowning," ejaculated the ferryman. "How old be you?"

"Eight, going on nine," answered Will.

"You're a big boy for your age," said the man. "But it's a wonder you didn't sink with that load; he's a big old fellow," referring to Turk, who, standing on three feet, was vigorously

shaking the water from his coat. Will at once knelt down beside him, and taking the uplifted foot in his hands, remarked: "He must have sprained one of his legs when he fell over that log; he doesn't whine like your common curs when they get hurt."

"He's blooded stock, then," said the man. "What kind of dog do you call him?"

"He's an Ulm dog," said Will.

"I never heard tell of that kind of dog before."

"Did you ever hear of a tiger-mastiff, German mastiff, boar-hound, great Dane? Turk's all of them together."

"Well," said the ferryman, "you're a pretty smart little fellow, and got lots of grit. You ought to make your mark in the world. But right now you had better get into some dry clothes." And on the invitation of the ferryman, Will and the limping dog got into the boat, and were taken back to camp.

Turk played so conspicuous and important a part in our early lives that he deserves a brief description. He was a large and powerful animal of the breed of dogs anciently used in Germany in hunting the wild boars. Later the dogs were imported into England, where they were particularly valued by people desiring a strong, brave watch-dog. When specially trained, they are more fierce and active than the English mastiff. Naturally they are not as fond of the water as the spaniel, the stag-hound, or the Newfoundland, though they are the king of dogs on land. Not alone Will, but the rest of the family, regarded Turk as the best of his kind, and he well deserved the veneration he inspired. His fidelity and almost human intelligence were time and again the means of saving life and property; ever faithful, loyal, and ready to lay down his life, if need be, in our service.

Outlaws and desperadoes were always to be met with on Western trails in those rugged days, and more than once Turk's constant vigilance warned father in time to prevent attacks from suspicious night prowlers. The attachment which had grown up between Turk and his young master was but the natural love of boys for their dogs intensified. Will at that time estimated dogs as in later years he did men, the qualities which he found to admire in Turk being vigilance, strength, courage, and constancy. With men, as with dogs, he is not lavishly demonstrative; rarely pats them on the back. But deeds of merit do not escape his notice or want his appreciation. The patience, unselfishness, and true nobility observed in this faithful canine friend of his boyhood days have many times proved to be lacking in creatures endowed with a soul; yet he has never lost faith in mankind, or in the ultimate destiny of his race. This I conceive to be a characteristic of all great men.

This trip was memorable for all of us, perhaps especially so for brother Will, for it comprehended not only his first deer, but his first negro.

As we drew near the Missouri line we came upon a comfortable farm-house, at which father made inquiry concerning a lodging for the night. A widow lived there, and the information that father was brother to Elijah Cody, of Platte County, Missouri, won us a cordial welcome and the hospitality of her home.

We were yet in the road, waiting father's report, when our startled vision and childish imagination took in a seeming apparition, which glided from the bushes by the wayside.

It proved a full-blooded African, with thick lips, woolly hair, enormous feet, and scant attire. To all except mother this was a new revelation of humanity, and we stared in wild-eyed wonder; even Turk was surprised into silence. At this point father rejoined us, to share in mother's amusement, and to break the spell for us by pleasantly addressing the negro, who returned a respectful answer, accompanied by an ample grin. He was a slave on the widow's plantation.

Reassured by the grin, Will offered his hand, and tasted the joy of being addressed as "Massa" in the talk that followed. It was with difficulty that we prevailed upon "Masse" to come to supper.

After a refreshing night's sleep we went on our way, and in a few days reached my uncle's home. A rest was welcome, as the journey had been long and toilsome, despite the fact that it had been enlivened by many interesting incidents, and was thoroughly enjoyed by all of the family.

## Will's First Indian

MY uncle's home was in Weston, Platte County, Missouri, at that time the large city of the West. As father desired to get settled again as soon as possible, he left us at Weston, and crossed the Missouri River on a prospecting tour, accompanied by Will and a guide. More than one day went by in the quest for a desirable location, and one morning Will, wearied in the reconnoissance, was left asleep at the night's camping-place, while father and the guide rode away for the day's exploring.

When Will opened his eyes they fell upon the most interesting object that the world just then could offer him--an Indian!

The "noble red man," as he has been poetically termed by people who have but known him from afar, was in the act of mounting Will's horse, while near by stood his own, a miserable, scrawny beast.

Will's boyish dreams were now a reality; he looked upon his first Indian. Here, too, was a "buck"--not a graceful, vanishing deer, but a dirty redskin, who seemingly was in some hurry to be gone. Without a trace of "buck fever," Will jumped up, rifle in hand, and demanded:

"Here, what are you doing with my horse?"

The Indian regarded the lad with contemptuous composure.

"Me swap horses with paleface boy," said he.

The red man was fully armed, and Will did not know whether his father and the guide were within call or not; but to suffer the Indian to ride away with Uncle Elijah's fine horse was to forfeit his father's confidence and shake his mother's and sisters' belief in the family hero; so he put a bold face upon the matter, and remarked carelessly, as if discussing a genuine transaction:

"No; I won't swap."

"Paleface boy fool!" returned the Indian, serenely.

Now this was scarcely the main point at issue, so Will contented himself with replying, quietly but firmly:

"You cannot take my horse."

The Indian condescended to temporize. "Paleface horse no good," said he.

"Good enough for me," replied Will, smiling despite the gravity of the situation. The Indian shone rather as a liar than a judge of horseflesh. "Good enough for me; so you can take your old rack of bones and go."

Much to Will's surprise, the red man dropped the rein, flung himself upon his own pony, and made off. And down fell "Lo the poor Indian" from the exalted niche that he had filled in Will's esteem, for while it was bad in a copper hero to steal horses, it was worse to flee from a boy not yet in his teens. But a few moments later Lo went back to his lofty pedestal, for Will heard the guide's voice, and realized that it was the sight of a man, and not the threats of a boy, that had sent the Indian about his business-- if he had any.

The guide had returned to escort Will to the spot which father, after a search of nearly a week, had discovered, and where he had decided to locate our home. It was in Salt Creek Valley, a fertile blue-grass region, sheltered by an amphitheater range of hills. The old Salt Lake trail traversed this valley. There were at this time two great highways of Western travel, the Santa Fe and the Salt Lake trails; later the Oregon trail came into prominence. Of these the oldest and most historic was the Santa Fe trail, the route followed by explorers three hundred years ago. It had been used by Indian tribes from time, to white men, immemorial. At the beginning of this century it was first used as an artery of commerce. Over it Zebulon Pike made his well-known Western trip, and from it radiated his explorations. The trail lay some distance south of Leavenworth. It ran westward, dipping slightly to the south until the Arkansas River was reached; then, following the course of this stream to Bent's Fort, it crossed the river and turned sharply to the south. It went through Raton Pass, and below Las Vegas it turned west to Santa Fe.

Exploration along the line of the Salt Lake trail began also with this century. It became a beaten highway at the time of the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo to their present place of abode. The trail crossed the Missouri River at Leavenworth, and ran northerly to the Platte, touching that stream at Fort Kearny. With a few variations it paralleled the Platte to its junction with the Sweetwater, and left this river valley to run through South Pass to big Sandy Creek, turning south to follow this little stream. At Fort Bridger it turned westward again, passed Echo Canon, and a few miles farther on ran into Salt Lake City. Over this trail journeyed thousands of gold-hunters toward California, hopeful and high-spirited on the westerly way, disappointed and depressed, the large majority of them, on the back track. Freighting outfits, cattle trains, emigrants--nearly all the western travel--followed this track across the new land. A man named Rively, with the gift of grasping the advantage of location, had obtained permission to establish a trading-post on this trail three miles beyond the Missouri, and as proximity to this depot of supplies was a manifest convenience, father's selection of a claim only two miles distant was a wise one.

The Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which provided for the organizing of those two territories and opened them for settlement, was passed in May, 1854. This bill directly opposed the Missouri Compromise, which restricted slavery to all territory south of 36° 30' north latitude. A clause in the new bill provided that the settlers should decide for themselves whether the new territories were to be free or slave states. Already hundreds of settlers were camped upon the banks of the Missouri, waiting the passage of the bill before

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