



E. Q. C. Judson (Ned Buntline).

Hon. W. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill).

Texas Jack.

As "Scouts of the Prairie" in Ned Buntline's play of that name.

# SOME OLD SCOUTS AND THEIR DEEDS

By DAVID LANSING

ILLUSTRATED BY RARE, OLD PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE COLLECTION OF ROBERT COSTER

THE old scouts have followed their last trail, memories of them are fast dying, and only when some rare bundle of photographs is dug from a forgotten corner are their weather-beaten faces recalled to a new generation and another era. "Buffalo Bill" is the unique exception as a link between the days of the wagon-trail, plainsman and Indian fighter and of the trans-continental express train. It is not easy to realize this picture of Colonel Cody as General Miles drew it from his own early recollections:

"He had a contract to supply the railroad construction gangs, then creeping across the plains, with buffalo meat. I remember him as a young man in the twenties, tall, stalwart and of magnificent physique. His golden locks were worn long, he had brilliant dark eyes and almost perfect features. He was a daring rider and one of the most expert riflemen I ever saw. He excelled in the wild rush after a buffalo herd and could kill more buffalo during a single run than any other man I have ever known. He not only took the risks of the desperate chase, but he and his party had to be constantly on the look-out for hostile Indians."

But the scouts won their spurs far from railroad tracks, and theirs was the duty to blaze the way for the settler and his civilization. The army in the Philippines has its alert chroniclers, ready to cable the news of every skirmish. The heroes of the West wrought their iron deeds far from the "special correspondent," and the scout who cast his lot with the handful of troops in some last stand was lucky to have his name mentioned in the official list of casualties sent to Washington. Here is a little story picked at random from scores of episodes as desperately heroic:

In 1874, a little army column moved from Fort Dodge, Kansas, against the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches and Kiowas, whose combined war-path was making a devastating swath. One detach-

ment, under Lieutenant Frank Baldwin, consisted of a body of trailers, guides and scouts, twenty-five frontiersmen, who were expert shots and plainsmen. With them was a party of friendly Delaware Indians. The column—infantry, cavalry and artillery—moved south a hundred miles, to Camp Supply. Then, guided by one of the greatest scouts of his time, Ben Clark, the march was laid across the Staked Plain, or El Llano Estacado, toward the Adobe Wall in the Texas Panhandle.

This column marched at the rate of twenty-five miles a day, suffering such hardship and privation as men have been seldom called to endure. There was no water in the beds of the streams, and the few stagnant pools were so full of gypsum that the men could not even drink coffee made of it. They were crossing a desert waste in which the heat rose to one hundred and ten in the shade day after day, without a cloud to break it. After the trail of the Indian marauders was struck, the infantry and cavalry marched sixty-five miles in two days.

Early one morning, Baldwin's detachment of scouts entered a gap in the bluff which skirted the Staked Plain. Two hundred and fifty Indians charged from the bluffs on both sides of the little advance party. The frontiersmen dropped to earth, and the fight opened at once, while they used their rifles to the best advantage. The friendly Delawares went into action with a rush, and their old chief, Fall Leaf, more than seventy years of age, rode up and down the line, his gray hair streaming in the wind, as he yelled to his men. This slender force held its ground, and opened the ball in masterly fashion, until the regulars came up on the run, eager to join the game.

At a desk in a stately office of the War Department Building in Washington, sits a grizzled soldier of dignified aspect, who wears the stars of a lieutenant-general on his shoulder-straps. On that fierce morn-





Seth Kinman, a veteran California hunter and trapper.

ing in this blazing hell of a country, he was a captain of cavalry, as fresh for a fight as if he were not physically worn to a standstill. As his troop flung itself into line, Captain A. R. Chaffee made one of his little battle-speeches, and then shouted as he charged:

"If any man is killed, I'll make him a corporal on the spot."

The Indians broke at the charge, and retreated twenty miles, over which they

were hotly followed. It was as rough country as mortal men ever tried to fight in. Through hills, buttes, ravines and cañons, across the dry bed of the Red River, the pursuit continued without faltering. The men suffered tortures, and many of them, during this chase, opened veins in their arms to moisten their black and swollen lips with their own blood.

The scouts were doing their duty, side by side with the troopers. A wagon train re-

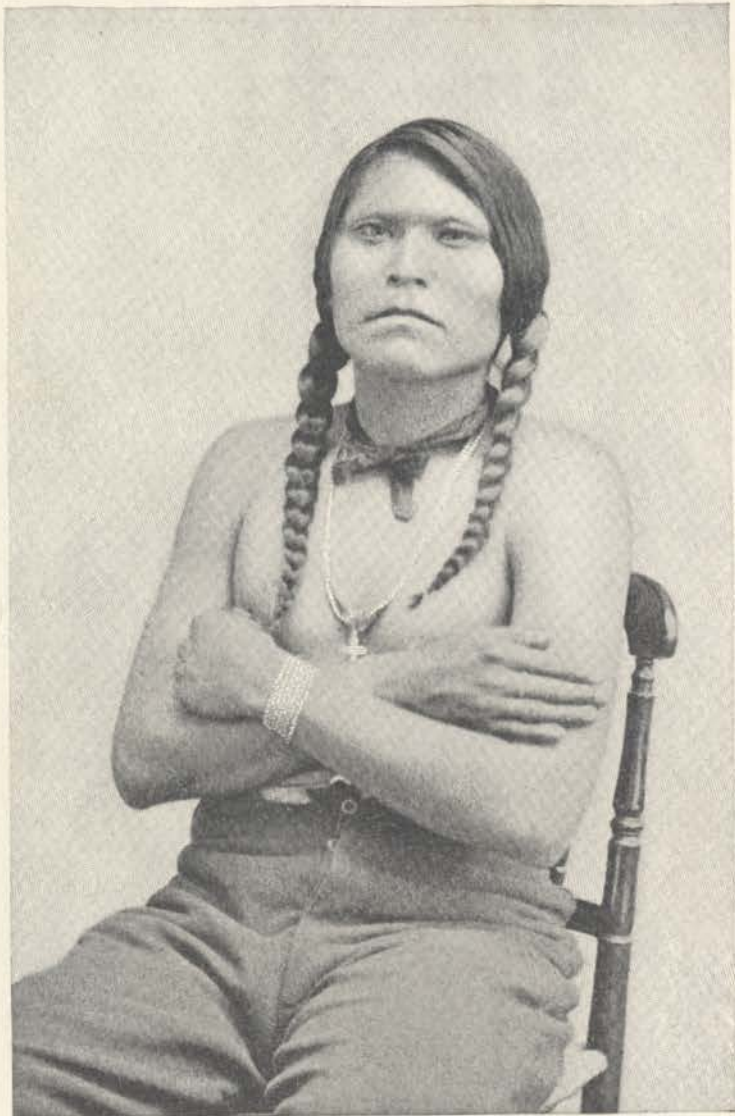


Little Crow—famous fighting chief.

turning from Camp Supply with stores for this column was surrounded by more than two hundred warriors. The escort of troopers would not abandon its precious convoy, and could not fight a way through. A young scout, named Schmalski, dashed at night, on horse-back, out through the close line of besiegers, and was chased for several

miles. He was near capture, when his horse ran into a herd of buffalo, and he escaped in the tumult and darkness. A little later, his horse stepped in a hole, threw him, and he lost his rifle. He went on all night, wore out his only horse, and pressed on, unarmed and on foot. By day he lay hidden in the brush, and trudged through





Curly, Custer's scout. The only survivor of the Little Big Horn battle.

the hostile country at night, without food or water, until he reached Camp Supply, where Colonel Lewis at once organized a relief column.

A little later, a detachment of six men was carrying dispatches from a command near Red River to Camp supply. Of the six, two were scouts, Amos Chapman and William Dixon. The others were cavalymen. Far from any refuge they were surrounded by nearly two hundred Indians. They sought shelter in a buffalo wallow, and prepared to hold their ground. The

attack came at six o'clock in the morning, and the long, long day stretched before them. In the first rush, four of these six men were wounded, Private Smith mortally so. The other hurts were severe. They were hemmed in on all sides in an open plain, and were outnumbered almost twenty to one. One of the scouts, while a severe fire was being poured in at them at close range, succeeded in throwing up a scanty entrenchment with his bowie knife and his bare hands. His comrades held the Kiowas and Comanches off until this



Indian Chief, Irétabe—Mohave Tribe.

little help was ready as a refuge, and they moved into the trench, the wounded walking with brave and painful effort.

Although Private Smith was wounded unto death, he sat upright in the trench to conceal his crippled condition from the foe. From early morning until night, this handful of five men was under an almost constant fire, often at such short range that they could bring their pistols into play. Thus they fought for their own lives and defended their dying comrade, without

food, and for drink only a little muddy rain-water mixed with their own blood. They killed more than a dozen Indians and wounded above a score.

Relief came that night, but it was thirty-six hours after their first attack before medical aid and food could be given them at the nearest post. Private Smith died before camp was reached. Every man was wounded, Scout Chapman severely, and Scout Dixon several times but not dangerously. This band of four soldiers and two





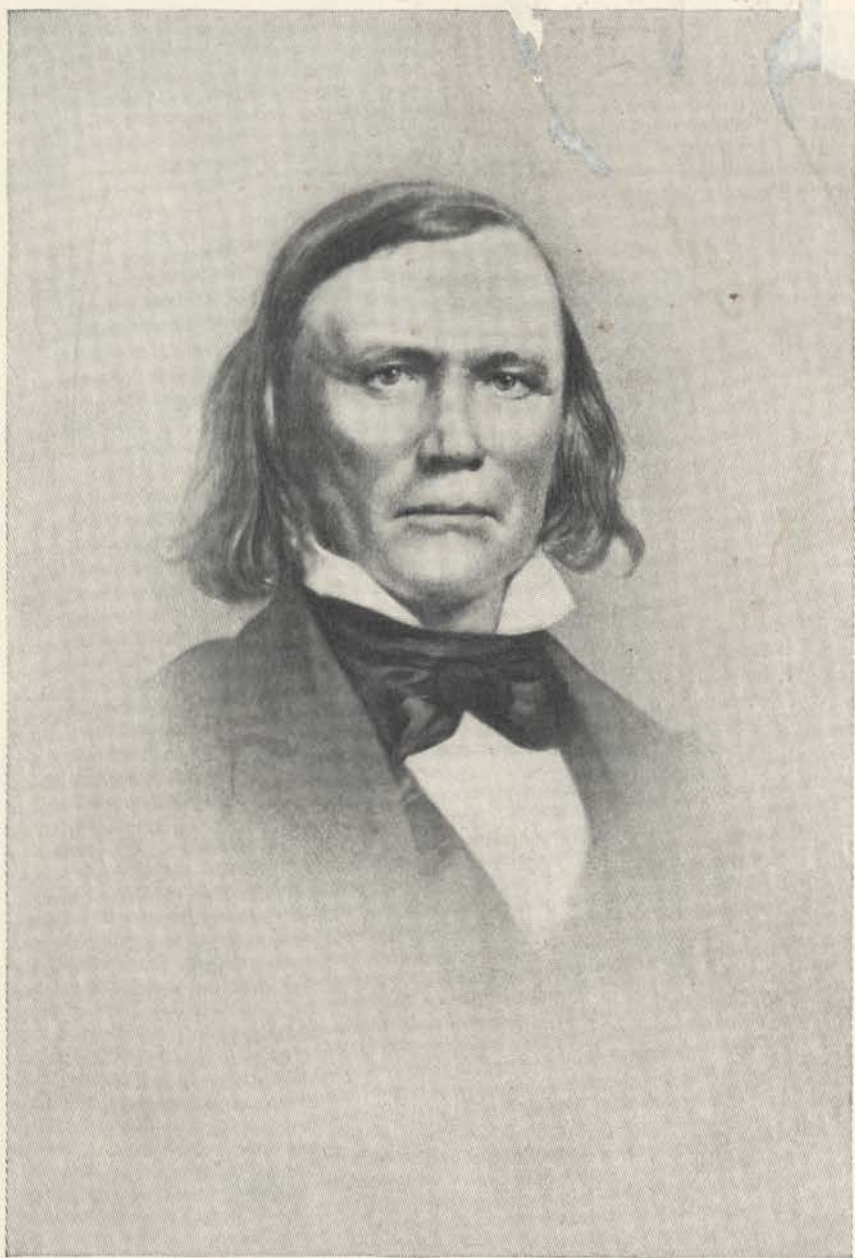
Captain Jack Hayes—scout and writer.

scouts were of those who had been fighting and marching for weeks amid the most dreadful privations. They were worn to skin and bone, but their souls were as "big as all outdoors," and they flinched at no odds under Heaven. And by such men as these was this nation made.

Mrs. Elizabeth Custer, who campaigned with her gallant and brilliant husband in the red days on the border, learned to know

the scout and the metal he was made of. She has paid him this tribute:

"I know well that when off duty the scout is often in affrays where lynching and outlawry are every-day events of the Western towns, but that had no effect upon the men's sense of honor when an officer reposed a trust in them. Wild Bill, California Joe, Buffalo Bill, Comstock, Charlie Reynolds, and a group of intrepid men be-



Kit Carson, a "Maker of the West."

sides, who from time to time served under my husband, would have defended with their lives any of us women put in their charge. I remember with distinctness what genuine admiration and gratitude filled my heart as these brave men rode up to my husband's tent to receive orders and dispatches.

"From my woman's standpoint, it required more and a vastly higher order of courage to undertake their desperate journeys than to charge in battle. Imagine, then, my admiration when my husband sent me letters by these scouts, and I saw them, ready to return to him through a hostile country, swing lightly into the saddle



and gallop off, apparently unconcerned, and freighted with our messages of affection."

The name of Custer recalls that scout whose sombre fame is hung upon so unique a distinction, that its mention recalls the horror of the tragedy of the Little Big Horn. For this Curley, an Upsaroka Crow Indian scout, was the only survivor of the Seventh Cavalry force, nearly three hundred strong, who died around their leader, General George Armstrong Custer, in June, 1876. Curley alone lived to struggle, half crazed, from that bloody field, and reach General Terry with an incoherent tale of the obliteration of Custer's command. And for years, or until Indians who had been with the attacking force had become tamed and willing to talk of that awful day, Curley's story was the only record of the last fight of Custer.

The story of the "last stand" is a familiar one. But the scene was once sketched in a few bold strokes by Walt Whitman in trying to describe the heroic canvas by John Mulvany, called "Custer's Last Rally," and his words are worth a place here as a setting for Curley's part in the drama.

"Forty or fifty figures," wrote Walt Whitman, "perhaps more, in full finish and detail, life-size, in the mid-ground, with three times that number or more through the rest of the picture, swarms upon swarms of savage Sioux in their war-bonnets, mostly on ponies, driving through the background, through the smoke like a hurricane of demons. A dozen of the figures are wonderful, altogether a Western, autochthonic phase of America and the frontiers, culminating, typical, deadly, heroic, to the utmost. Nothing in the books like it, nothing in Homer, nothing in Shakespeare; more grim and sublime than either, all native, all our own, and all a fact.

"A great lot of muscular, tan-faced men, brought to bay under terrible circumstances, death a-hold of them, yet every man undaunted, not one losing his head, wringing out every cent of the pay before they sell their lives. Custer, his hair cut short, stands in the middle with dilated eye and extended arm, aiming a huge cavalry pistol. Captain Cook is there, mortally wounded, blood on the white handkerchief around his head, but aiming his carbine coolly, half

kneeling. His body was afterward found close to Custer's.

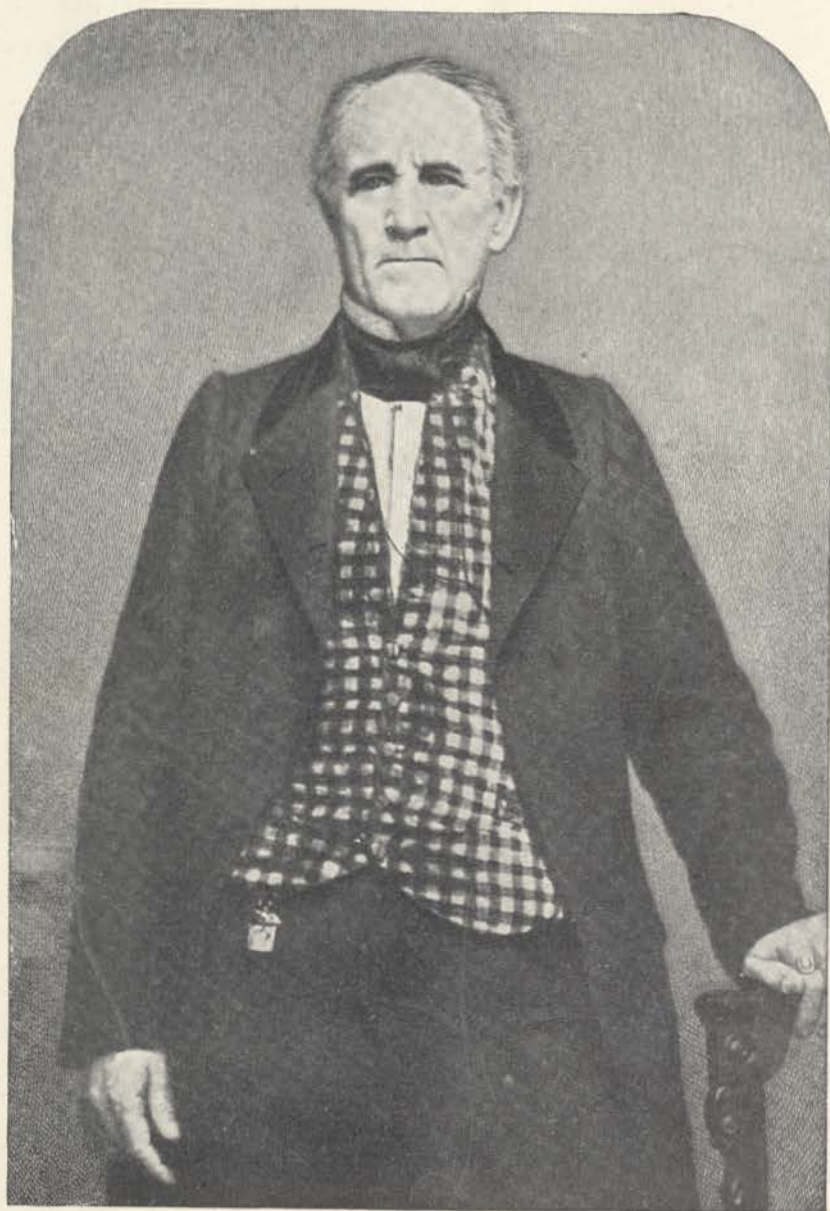
"The slaughtered and half-slaughtered horses make a peculiar feature. Two dead Indians, herculean, lie in the foreground, clutching their rifles, very characteristic. The many soldiers, their faces and attitudes, the broad-brimmed Western hats, the powder smoke in puffs, the dying horses with their rolling eyes almost human in their agony, the clouds of war-bonneted Sioux in the background, the figures of Custer and Cook, with indeed the whole scene, inexpressible, dreadful, yet with an attraction and fierce beauty that will remain forever in my memory. A sunny sky and clear light envelop it all."

Such was the inferno from which the scout Curley escaped. He stayed with Custer until the end was in sight. Then he wiped from his face the war-paint of his tribe, shook down his hair, and stole, in the powder smoke and uproar, toward the charging Sioux. He saw one of them fall from his pony, and picking up a dead-man's blanket, Curley wrapped it around him, and ran to the pony of the wounded Indian. He was able to mount it without detection, and pretended to ride toward Custer's lines. Watching his chance, he dashed up a nearby ravine, and was out of the battle.

Then he rode for his life and managed to reach General Terry, who was coming up the Big Horn river on the steamer *Far West*. The General could not credit the awful news, nor could Curley give more than a most confused account, as he was almost insane with terror and grief. Alas, when the surviving cavalry of Reno and Benteen was able to occupy the field, they found it was all as Curley said. The bodies lay as they had fallen, by troops, in-line-of-battle-formation, noble windrows of the dead, behind them the subaltern officers, in front of them the troop commanders. Thus their bodies wrote on the bloody grass the story of their heroic death, without panic, without fear, soldiers to the bitter end.

When Curley had recovered from the shock, he told what he recalled through an interpreter, whose rendering was partly as follows:

"Curley says he went down with two other Crows, and went into action with Custer. The General, he says, kept down



Sam Houston—pioneer, scout, soldier and statesman.

the river on the north bank four miles, after Reno had crossed to the south side above. He thought Reno would sweep down the valley so that they could attack the Sioux villages on both sides, he believing Reno would take them at the other end, while he (Custer) would go in at the lower end.

"At last Custer found a ford, and dashed for it. The Indians met him, and poured in a heavy fire from across the river. Cus-

ter dismounted his men to fight on foot, but could not get his skirmishers over the stream, and meantime hundreds of Indians, on foot and on ponies, poured over the river (which was only about three feet deep), and filled the ravines on each side of Custer's men.

"Custer then fell back on some high ground behind him, and seized the nearest ravines. The Indians wholly surrounded



Custer, and poured in a terrible fire on all sides. They charged Custer on foot in vast numbers, Curley says, but were again and again driven back.

"The fight began about two o'clock, and lasted until the sun went down over the hills. The men fought desperately, and after the ammunition in their belts was exhausted, they went to their saddle-bags and got more and continued to fight.

"He says, also, that the Big Chief Custer lived until nearly all his men had been killed or wounded, and went about encouraging his soldiers to fight on. Curley says that when he saw Custer was surrounded he watched his chance until the Sioux charged among them, and they did not know him from one of their own men. He caught a pony, and got away.

"When he saw the party was to be all killed, Curley says he went to Custer and begged him to let him show him a way of escape. He waved Curley away and rode back to the little group of men to die with them. Curley says he did not leave Custer until the battle was nearly over. He is quite sure the Indians had more killed than Custer had white men with him.

"Custer got shot in the left side before Curley went away, and sat down with his pistol in his hand. Another shot struck Custer and he fell over. The last officer killed was a man who rode a white horse.

"Curley says, as he rode off, nearly a mile from the battle-field, he saw in a ravine a dozen soldiers fighting with Sioux all around them. He thinks all were killed, as they were dismounted and were outnumbered five to one. (These were no doubt part of the thirty-five men reported missing in General Terry's dispatches.) Curley says he saw one cavalry soldier who got away. He was well mounted, but had been shot through both hips, and Curley thinks he died of his wounds, starved to death, or more likely his trail was followed and he was killed by the Sioux."

Nearly thirty years after the battle, Two Moons, a Sioux who was in the attack, told his recollections of that day, and said of the last moments of this magnificent "last stand":

"At last, about a hundred men and five horsemen stood on the hill, all huddled together. All along the bugler kept blowing

his commands. He was very brave, too. Then the five horsemen and the bunch of men, maybe forty now, started toward the river. A man on a sorrel horse with a white face led them, shouting all the time. He was a brave man. He wore a buckskin shirt, and had long black hair and a long black moustache. His men were all covered with dust. He fought hard with a big knife. All the soldiers were now killed, and the bodies were stripped. We came to the man with the big moustache, he lay down the hill toward the river. The Indians did not take his buckskin shirt. The Sioux said:

"This is a big chief. This is Long Hair' (Custer).

"I don't know. I have never seen him. But the man on the white-faced sorrel was the bravest man I saw."

This brave unknown, with the buckskin shirt and the long black hair: what an epic figure he makes, as he leads the forlorn hope in the last counter-charge, "shouting all the time," fighting hard "with his big knife!" He was one of the scouts with Custer's column, that is all that is known about him. And for him was also reserved the honor accorded the General who died there, that his body should not be stripped after death, because of his conspicuous bravery in his last hour.

Of such breed were the scouts who bled and fought and suffered with those little columns in blue that tracked across the plains in the days that are no more. Kit Carson, king of them all, scout, soldier, and general, rose from the ranks of the Western hunters and trappers, fighting Indians, Mexicans and Confederates, as his duty called. Of such stuff were made such men as Seth Kingman and Jack Hayes, whose photographs tell better than any eulogy could do, in what heroic mould they were cast. Stern, resolute, light-hearted when there was time for it, standing on their own two feet against the world, self-sufficient and as "hard as nails," they were Americans to be proud of. The East does not know their handiwork, but the West reads it in its soil, and in the most vital pages of its history. Conditions made the men to meet them, and they turned to and whipped conditions to a standstill like the giants they were.