BUFFALO BILL ON A TREASURE HUNT
or THE SECRET HOARD OF THE YAQUIES

Before Buffalo Bill could draw his revolver, the Yaqui grappled with him. Then began a fearful struggle for life on the brink of that deadly chasm.
Buffalo Bill on a Treasure Hunt;

OR,

The Secret Hoard of the Yaquis.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OF THE SECRET HOARD.

"Yes, old fellow, the story is an interesting one," said Buffalo Bill; "but as to the chances of finding the treasure and getting away with it, I must confess that I'm rather skeptical."

When the famous king of the scouts uttered this opinion, he was sitting by a camp-fire on the southern border of Texas, near the Rio Grande. He formed one of a hunting party that had been shooting and trapping in that part of the country for several weeks during the summer of 187—.

Another member of the party was Jack Dixon, a fearless and gallant young frontiersman, with whom the border king had become very friendly. Dixon had been telling Cody the story of a hidden treasure of which he had heard, down in Mexico, and had been suggesting that they should make up a party to go in search of it.

"I haven't got the slightest doubt that the treasure is there, all right," said Dixon, "and why shouldn't we get it as well as anybody else?"

As he spoke, a grizzled, weather-beaten old trapper came up to the camp-fire, and threw down the carcass of a black bear, under which he had staggered from the wood near-by.

"Hello, Nick!" said Buffalo Bill. "So you have some luck! I guessed as much when I heard your old rifle go off just awhile ago."

"Yes, I brought the beast down with one shot," rejoined old Nick Wharton, one of Cody's oldest and most trusty comrades, with some pride. "Got him right through the brain! We'll have b'ar steaks for sup'ro night, boys. They'll taste pretty good after deer meat and jerked stuff. But what was that I heard you sayin' about treasure, Dixon? I guess I've heard you throw out hints about sunthin' o' that kind afore to-day."

"I was telling Cody about a hidden treasure I know
of down in Mexico,” replied the young man. “I suggested that it might pay us well to get up an expedition and go in search of it. It would make us all rich men for life. As I understand it, the hoard is worth several millions of dollars.”

“Gosh my suspenders, but that sounds good!” ejaculated old Nick Wharton. “But I kinder reckon that’s a joke in the deck somewhar, ain’t thi’?”

“One little difficulty is that the treasure is guarded by the Yaquis, the most bloodthirsty and formidable Indians in all Mexico,” remarked Buffalo Bill dryly.

“Let’s see how many of ‘em we kin reckon up, Buffle,” said old Nick Wharton. “I guess I know of more of them treasure hunters than you, fur I’ve been on the border long before you war born.”

“That was Digger Ned, who went after some ancient gold-mine down in lower California. The Tularis settled his business. An’ you remember Jake White, I guess. The Cimmarons killed him in a purty nasty way.”

“Just think of the men we knew who have left their bones to bleach in Death Valley,” returned the border king. “Dick Kennedy, Red Langdon, Roaring Jim Hackett, Bob Alton—there are a host of them.”

“Yes, and the fellers who went down into Sonora, after we left it three years ago, and were all killed by the Injuns afore they could reach the old Aztec silver mine.”

“Who were all these men you are talking about, and what have they to do with the matter?” asked Jack Dixon somewhat impatiently.

“They were all treasure seekers or hunters after fabled mines of extraordinary richness,” said the king of the scouts. “As to what became of them—why, they are all dead! The lure of gold proved fatal to them.”

“And you think that it would prove fatal to us?”

“I think there is a pretty good chance of that.”

“But at all events it would be a fine adventure,” put in the fourth member of the party, who was none other than that chivalrous and gallant scout, “Wild Bill” Hickok, the favorite of Custer and the tried friend of Buffalo Bill.

“Yes, that is true,” agreed Cody. “I have heard a lot about the Yaquis, but never had a chance to see them. I certainly would like to visit them, for they must be a very interesting people, by all accounts.”

“What’s the story about your treasure?” asked Nick Wharton, turning to Dixon, and busing himself in cutting some steaks from the bear and making them ready to fry over the fire.

“We’ll hear it while we’re having supper,” said Cody. “I’ve only heard the bare outline of it, and I’m as hungry as a grizzly after the winter. We’ll go into the matter thoroughly, and maybe we’ll decide to make the trip after all.”

In a few minutes the four hunters fell to work heartily

on the bear steaks, which they devoured with the appetite born of their healthy, open-air life. After they had finished their coffee and lighted their pipes, Dixon opened up his scheme.

“This treasure hoard that I want to secure is part of the ancient wealth of the Aztecs,” he said. “It has been seized by the Yaqui Indians, and is guarded by them as a sacred tenet. More than one man, to my knowledge, has lost his life in trying to take it away from them. You see, I do not want to deceive you about the business, much as I want your help.”

“But what about the moral aspect of the question?” asked Buffalo Bill. “It seems to me that this treasure belongs to the Yaquis, if it belongs to anybody; and I don’t wonder that they are not kindly disposed toward people who try to take it away from them.”

“There you are wrong,” replied Jack Dixon eagerly. “If there is any lawful owner of the treasure after the lapse of the centuries since the Aztecs were crushed and exterminated by Cortez and his Spaniards, that owner is myself.”

“That sounds queer,” remarked Wild Bill. “How do you make it out?”

“Two years ago I was employed as overseer on the ranch of a rich Mexican named Don Ramon Mercado,” said the young man. “It was situated only about a hundred miles from the border of the Yaquis’ country, and Indians raids happened every now and then. Luckily we did not suffer much, for there was a strong post of Mexican soldiers near-by our ranch.”

“The Yaquis, you know, have never been conquered by the Mexicans, though they have fought with them, off and on, for generations. There is always fighting along the border. The best the Mexicans can do is to repel the raids that are made on their ranches and villages, and keep the Yaquis penned up within the confines of their own mountainous and heavily timbered country.”

“Well, after I had worked on the ranch about a year, there was a big raid of the Yaquis. They burned two or three haciendas, and then a strong force of Mexican rurales caught them and wiped out pretty nearly all of them. Only about a dozen contrived to get away and carry the news of the defeat to their mountain villages, where the soldiers dared not follow them.”

“There were some wounded prisoners, and I happened to be at the fort near our ranch when they were brought in. One of them instantly attracted my attention.”

“I think he was the most remarkable man I have ever seen. He must have been over eighty years old, but he was as straight as a lance, and he stood well over six feet high. His movements were as quick and agile as those of a young man, and the fiery glance of his black eyes showed that the years which had whitened his hair had not tamed his warrior’s spirit.”

“His features were regular and handsome, and his
complexion was very light—only a slight copper color. He was quite unlike any other Mexican Indian I had ever seen.

"He was suffering from two gunshot wounds, and his head had been broken by a blow with the butt of a rifle; but his spirit had not been crushed. Although he could hardly stand, owing to weakness from pain and loss of blood, he struck a {rurale} in the face when the latter insulted him.

"The soldier drew his sword-bayonet and would have stabbed the old man to the heart, had I not rushed in front of him, revolver in hand, and protected him.

"Just at that moment, the commandant of the post strolled up, and asked what was the matter. I told him that one of his men was about to kill a wounded prisoner, whose life I had saved.

"'Why did you put yourself to that trouble, my friend?' the officer asked, rolling a cigarette between his fingers. 'These rascals are all to be shot in a few minutes. I have sent for the firing-squad. You have only prolonged the man's life by a few minutes. He might as well have been stabbed as shot.'

"'But these are wounded prisoners,' I said indignantly. 'You don't mean to say that you will shoot them down in cold blood!'

"'But certainly, señor,' he replied, bowing politely and offering me a cigarette. 'They are Yaquis. You must know very well that we never give quarter to Yaquis. Those are the orders of the government. We are trying to stamp out the whole pestilent race.'

"I protested strongly, but it was no use. The officer was polite, but firm; and he was quite correct in saying that he was merely carrying out the orders of his superiors.

"The firing-squad came up, and the prisoners were ranged in a line, with their backs against an adobe wall. The word to fire was about to be given, when a young lieutenant came running up from another part of the fort, shouting to the men to halt.

"He stopped, breathless, before the commandant, and saluted.

"'That man is not a Yaqui, señor,' he said, pointing to the old warrior whom I had vainly tried to save. 'As you know, I was in command of the party that captured him. At that time, he was a prisoner in the hands of the Yaquis; and they actually tried to kill him rather than allow him to fall into our hands. I shot down a Yaqui who was on the point of running him through with a spear.'

"The commandant hesitated. He was a man of a domineering nature, and he did not like having his plans crossed.

"'He was caught with the Yaquis. He is an Indian. He should die with them. The orders of the government on the matter are imperative,' he objected.

"'But they only apply to the Yaquis,' I put in, determined that this fine-looking old man should not die if I could help it. 'Any one can see at a glance that this man is not a Yaqui. He belongs to some other tribe, but what it is I have no idea, for I never saw an Indian like him.'

"The commandant still hesitated, and I took the bull by the horns.

"'If you insist on executing this man, señor,' I said, 'I shall acquaint my employer, Don Ramon Mercado, with the facts, and he will bring your conduct to the attention of the government.'

"This decided the matter, and the commandant sullenly gave the order to remove the old man from the squad of doomed prisoners. He knew very well that Don Ramon had great political influence and could get him into serious trouble with the government if he were minded to do so.

"The other prisoners were promptly shot, and my protegé, who had so narrowly escaped their fate, looked on without the quiver of an eyelid.

"'You may as well take the fellow away with you to your ranch, since you have saved him,' said the commandant. 'I don't want to be troubled with him any more.'

"I dressed the man's wounds, put him on a horse, and took him to Don Ramon's hacienda. My employer was much interested in the story.

"'Do you mean to tell me that you don't know what tribe this man belongs to?' he asked. 'He belongs to the greatest race of Indians that ever lived in Mexico. He is an Aztec.'

"'An Aztec!' I exclaimed, in surprise. 'Why, I thought that all the Aztecs had been exterminated generations ago.'

"'That is the common belief, but none the less this man is an Aztec,' said Don Ramon. 'Is that not the truth?' he asked, turning to the old man, and speaking in the Spanish patois commonly used by the half-civilized Indians of Mexico.

"'Yes, I am an Aztec—the last of my race,' was the reply, given in excellent Castilian, which showed that the man had been well educated. 'I am Atualalpa, the descendant of the ancient caciques who ruled over this land, and served the temples of the sun, before the white men destroyed the empire of Montezuma.'

"Don Ramon was deeply interested by this, for he was an enthusiastic antiquarian, and had always taken the deepest interest in the remains of the Aztec empire. He made the old man welcome to the hacienda, and insisted on treating him as an honored guest, instead of sending him to herd with the servants, as would have been done with other Indians.

"When he had had a bath, and dressed himself in one of Don Ramon's own suits of clothes, he turned out
to be an educated and well-bred gentleman, carrying himself as became the descendant of kings. He dined that evening with us and Donna Dolores, my employer's daughter."

"After dinner, he told us that he had been educated in Spain and France, and had traveled all over the world. His father had been a wealthy man, having inherited a small portion of the vast lost wealth of the Aztecs.

"When my father died, twenty years ago," our guest went on, "I was called upon to take up his life-work—the work that has devolved upon the head of my race ever since the Spaniards crushed the empire of Montezuma. It is to find the lost treasures of the Aztecs, which was carried away and hidden by a few faithful warriors when the great city of Tenochtitlan—now the City of Mexico—was captured by Cortez."

"Then that treasure really exists," said Don Ramon eagerly. "I have heard many rumors about it, but I thought they were fables."

"It exists," replied Atuahalpa, 'and I know where it is. I have been trying for many years to secure it, but I have failed."

"What does it consist of?" asked the Mexican curiously.

"Vast temples of the golden vessels that were used in the services of the temples of the sun, bags of rubies and emeralds, which must be worth many millions of dollars in American money, and thousands of other precious stones and jeweled ornaments," said Atuahalpa. "It is the greatest hidden treasure anywhere in the world. There cannot be another like it."

"And it is hidden in the country of the Yaquis," said Don Ramon acutely. "You were seeking for it there when you were made prisoner, first by the Yaquis, and then by our Mexican soldiers."

"The old man smiled grimly."

"It is true, señor," he said, "but I cannot tell you where it is. I have taken an oath to reveal the place to no man until my death is at hand. I will show you the oath."

"He left the dining-room, and went to the place where he had left his old clothes. He soon returned, bearing in his hand a piece of parchment, which was yellow with age."

"You are a scholar who has studied the secrets of the Aztecs," he said to Don Ramon. "Can you read this?"

"Mercado took it in his hand, and saw that it was covered with curiously drawn pictures and symbols done in red and blue paint."

"It is the old Aztec picture-writing," he said. "I think I can make it out."

"He studied it closely for a few minutes, and then slowly read out the following, of which I took a copy at the time:

"I, Atuahalpa, lord of Tenochtitlan and the Land of Fire, descendant of the Emperor Montezuma and of all the caciques of the sun, do solemnly swear by Quetzal the Beautiful, Lord of Life, that I will search for the lost treasure of the Aztecs all my days."

"If I find it, I will expend it in trying to restore the lost empire of the Aztecs, if that be possible. If it be not possible, then I will spend it in doing good to the oppressed and suffering people of all lands, reserving for my own use only the fiftieth part of the treasure."

"Caramba, but this is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of!" said Don Ramon, who now thoroughly believed the story.

"The last provision in the oath was inserted in the days of my grandfather, when it became obvious that the Aztec empire could never again be restored," Atuahalpa explained. "It is, of course, still more obvious now, for I am the last of the Aztecs, so far as I know."

"I am an old man, and cannot expect to live much longer. When I am dying, if the treasure is still undiscovered, I shall give the secret to the best white man I know, so that he may spend the treasure for the good of mankind."

"I hope you will not select me as your heir," said Don Ramon laughing. "I have more money than I know what to do with already, and the proper spending of such a vast sum would be a tremendous responsibility."

"The old Aztec made no reply, but he produced another piece of yellow parchment."

"I do not think you can read this, Don Ramon," he said.

"Mercado puzzled over it for some time, and then had to confess that it baffled him."

"It is in the writing of the ancient people who held the land before the Aztecs," Atuahalpa said. "I am the only man in the world who now understands it. Even in the days of Montezuma it was only known to the chief priests and caciques of the Aztecs. It is in this writing that the location of the treasure is set down, so that if by chance it is lost no man could read it."

"But it will not be of much use to the white man whom you may select as your heir to the secret," Don Ramon objected.

"I will give him a translation."

"That ended the talk on the subject for the night, but you may be sure that both Don Ramon and I thought a great deal about it afterward."

"The old Aztec stayed with us on the ranch for some time, recovering from his wounds, which were not of a very serious nature."

"Three weeks later he came up to me, after breakfast, and seemed very much agitated."

"Señor Dixon," he said, "I had a strange dream last night. As I slept I saw all the dead caciques of my race pass in procession before me, led by the melancholy
and unfortunate Montezuma, and ending with my own father.

"One by one they warned me that my death was at hand, and that I must prepare at once to pass my secret on to another. I have chosen you, for you saved my life, and I have watched you carefully and have found you to be a man of honor.

"Here are the two parchments that I showed to Don Ramon," he went on, handing to me a small packet done up in oilskin. 'I have put Spanish translations with them. They will show you how to find the treasure, if you care to take the risk.

"I will not bind you with an oath, for you are not an Aztec. With my death, the old purpose of the treasure will die. I only ask your word of honor that, if you should find it, you will spend it in doing good, keeping only the fiftieth part for yourself and my friends whom you may take with you. That small fraction alone would give half-a-dozen men great fortunes.

"Keep the packet carefully, and if I do not die in a month I may ask you to return it to me. It is an old tradition of my race that the cacique is given a month's warning of his death by the spirits of his ancestors.'

"Of course, I ridiculed the dream, telling the old Aztec that a man of his education ought to be above such foolish superstition. But I accepted the charge he gave me, more to make his mind easy than anything else.

"A week later, we were alarmed by reports that an epidemic of yellow fever was sweeping all through Mexico, having started at Vera Cruz and other Gulf ports. People died by the thousand, and at last the scourge struck our ranch.

"Two of the peons died, and then the old Aztec was attacked by the disease. He made a gallant fight for life, for he had a splendid constitution; but he died on the last day of the month that he had told me was allotted to him for a warning."

Buffalo Bill and his brother scouts had listened to the strange story which Dixon told with breathless interest. At this point the king of the scouts asked:

"Have you made any attempt to find the treasure?"

"No. The Yaquis were very active in their hostility to all whites at that time, and it was positive madness to try to enter their country. I hear, from letters I have received from Mexico, that they are quieter now. Then, too, I decided to defer the attempt until I could get a few men whom I could thoroughly trust to go with me. No man, it struck me on reflection, could possibly carry off such a treasure alone. He could only take away some of the rubies and emeralds that Atuahalpa spoke of. We should need several men, to say nothing of pack-mules, in order to remove the heavy golden ornaments."

"And that would mean that we should be in great danger of being discovered by the Yaquis," said Buffalo Bill.

"Precisely."

"Have you still got those two parchments you spoke of?"

"Yes. Here they are."

Dixon took out a small oilskin packet, which he wore round his neck by a silken cord, hidden beneath his hunting-shirt. He opened it, and handed the parchments to Buffalo Bill.

The three scouts looked at the curious hieroglyphics with interest, but of course they could make nothing of them.

Then Dixon showed Cody the Spanish translations, which the king of the scouts could read easily.

"The description of the location of the treasure seems to be very precise," he said. "There is an air of truth and definiteness about it which convinces me that the old man knew what he was talking about and was telling the truth. But why did he never succeed in getting the treasure himself?"

"He tried often, but he had bad luck. More than once he narrowly escaped with his life. The Yaquis, you see, know where it is; and guard it very carefully, for it is sacred to them."

"Yes, I see that it is hidden in a sacred cave in a mountain near their principal village," said Cody. "What do you say, pards? Are you inclined to join in this adventure? I am."

"And so am I," declared Wild Bill.

"You kin count me in," said old Nick Wharton.

"Then we four are enough," Dixon said. "We can trust one another, and we don't want to bring any outsiders in and run the risk of treachery. Of course, we must all agree to abide by the old Aztec's demand, that only a fiftieth of any treasure we may get shall be reserved for our own personal use."

The three scouts immediately and cheerfully agreed to this. None of them was of an avaricious nature, and they were embarking on the enterprise more for the adventure of it than from any expectation of winning wealth.

"Why did you leave Don Ramon's ranch and come north here?" Buffalo Bill asked Dixon, before they rolled up in their blankets to sleep for the night. "I should have thought you would have preferred to stay where you would be nearer to the treasure, and might find a chance to get at it."

The young man blushed.

"The truth is," he said, "I fell in love with Donna Dolores, the daughter of Don Ramon, who is a very sweet and beautiful girl. I could not bear to stay there in the hacienda with her, and not be able to tell her of my love."

"Well, why didn't you tell her, then?" asked the knight
of the plains. "Faint heart never won fair lady. You didn't expect her to tell you, did you?"

"Of course not. But you don't understand the position. Her father is an immensely wealthy man, and she is a great heiress. I was penniless, except for the salary which Don Ramon paid me. How could I ask her to marry me? I should have been regarded as a fortune-hunter."

"So you thought that you would come up north and try to make enough money to justify you in asking for her hand?"

"Exactly. My uncle left me the small ranch I am running now. I hoped to develop it and make money, but I have not been very successful. What with drought and the Apache raids, I have lost a great part of my stock. But I always had the idea of finding some good men whom I could trust to go on this treasure hunt with me, and now I have succeeded. I feel that I am at least one step nearer to winning Donna Dolores."

"I think you made a mistake," said Buffalo Bill. "If you loved the girl, you should have found out whether she loved you. If she did, she would have been ready enough to wait for you while you were trying to make your fortune. As it is, you may find that when you are ready to ask for her, she is married to another man."

"I hope not," Dixon said, wincing. "All the lost treasure of the Aztecs would not compensate me for losing her."

CHAPTER II.
BUFFALO BILL'S SHORT WAY WITH SCAMPS.

"I don't much like the look of the place," said Buffalo Bill doubtfully. "It looks as if it were patronized by a pretty tough crowd, but that's true of most of these border taverns. Most of the patrons are either gamblers or 'greasers,' I reckon."

"No doubt," agreed Wild Bill. "But we might as well put up here for the night. The horses are tired, and a bed in a tavern, however, bad it is, will be a change to this everlasting sleeping out under the stars in a blanket."

"Give me the clean fresh air in preference to a place that is haunted by greasers," returned Buffalo Bill. "However, have it your own way."

The three scouts and their young friend, Jack Dixon, had come to a halt, at dusk, in a small border settlement on the American side of the Rio Grande.

Following out the decision they had come to after hearing Dixon's story, they were on their way down to Mexico.

The settlement at which they decided to halt for the night was called Harker's Folly, because it had been established by a man of that name, and had been very far from fulfilling the large ideas of its promoter. It had not thrived, and now consisted only of a few long cabins, two dilapidated stores, and the tavern before which the scouts had reined up their horses.

Buffalo Bill and his companions, experienced as they were in studying frontier types, speedily saw that the inhabitants of the village were by no means of the best class. Several of them were Mexicans of the lowest character, and others bore every mark of belonging to the class of gambler desperadoes who caused so much trouble in many of the small towns in the Southwest at that time.

The king of the scouts, although no man was more to be feared in a fight, was not in the habit of looking for trouble. By nature, he was not a quarrelsome man. For this reason, he was in favor of going on instead of staying at the settlement; but he was overruled by his companions.

Entering the saloon, they saw at once that it was nothing better than a gambling-hell. The proprietor was shouting loudly:

"Make your bets, gentlemen! Make your bets! The game is just about to open. Pony up your dust, sports! The bank stands ready to cover anything you lay down."

The keeper of the gambling-hell was doing a roaring business that summer night in more senses than one.

Trade was brisk, for several traders had struck the town in the afternoon, and they were now adding to the regular custom of the saloon, which, like nearly all saloons in the Southwest, had a faro and roulette layout attached.

As "Faro Pete," the keeper of the saloon, roared out his invitation, several men pressed forward eagerly to buy the chips, which represented the stakes of the game. Pete's eyes sparkled more evilly and greedily than ever as he raked in the money, which in many cases represented the savings of months of hard toil.

"Come, stranger, ain't you going to put up a stake and sit in the game?"

The ill-favored gambler spoke sharply to Cody, who stood in a corner of the room, gazing at the scene with mild interest, but not sharing in the slightest degree in the excitement of the reckless plungers around him.

Cody shook his head.

"No. I don't feel like playing," he said.

"Then what in 'tarnation air yo' hyar fur?" growled a ruffianly bartender, coming up to his side threateningly at a sign from Pete. "Thar ain't no room in this yer shebang fer fellers as don't want ter be sports. I'm paid ter bounce all sech—see?"

"In that case you had better go ahead and earn your wages," Buffalo Bill replied, smiling cheerily, but with a steely glint in his eyes that boded no good to the man who should attack him.

The "bouncer" paused for a moment, sizing up the tough contract he had undertaken. He had caught that look in Cody's eyes and didn't like it.
"Pile in, Bill. What in thunder are you waiting for?" cried the saloon-keeper.

Inspired by this order, and stung by the loud guffaws of the crowd, Bill sailed in.

He had a local reputation as a fighter, and it was even said that he had been famous in the Eastern prize-ring years before. Whether that was so or not, he had easily knocked out everybody whom he had encountered at the settle-

ment.

He rushed at Cody, intending to put him out of business with an upper-cut on the point of the chin, and then heave him through the door, before he could regain his senses; but he reckoned without his host.

His blow was cleverly warded, and Buffalo Bill countered with a left-hander between the eyes that stretched him flat upon the floor.

Bill was on his feet again in a moment, with an evil look in his eyes. He could not afford to be beaten, for it would mean the end of his reign as the bully of the place.

He sparred for time, and soon found that Cody knew quite as much about boxing as he did, if not more.

The men in the saloon stood aside and made a ring, willing even to stop their gambling for the excitement of a good fight.

Buffalo Bill stood on the defensive and parried the blows rained on him with ease.

Presently, rendered desperate by the gibes of the crowd, Bill tried to clinch with his opponent, hoping to grasp him by the throat and so far throttle him that victory would be easy.

But Cody read his foe's design in his eye, and sprang back quickly. Bill rushed after him, but was met with two stunning blows, one full on the point of the chin and the other in the solar-plexus.

With a single gasp, he went down to the floor and lay there, motionless and unconscious. It was a clean knock-

out.

The crowd shouted their delight at this termination to the fight, for Bill and his master had few friends even among the men upon whose passions and weaknesses they lived.

"Now, would you like to put me out, or shall I stay?" said Cody to Pete.

That worthy glared at him for a moment in speech-

less rage, and then his hand went swiftly down to his belt and rested upon the butt of his revolver.

But before he could draw it, Buffalo Bill was upon him, gripping him in a viselike hold and forcing him backward to the ground.

Pete was a powerful man, and he did his best to put up a fight, but he was almost as helpless as a baby in the hands of his herculean adversary.

Before the bystanders had time to fully grasp what was happening, much less to interfere, Pete was stretched upon the floor beside his still unconscious lieutenant. His revolver had been jerked from his hand and tossed away to a corner of the room.

"Now, gentlemen, I think you can go on with your game," said Buffalo Bill politely, turning to the crowd. "I am sorry to have delayed it, but I couldn't help myself."

"Don't apologize, boss," said a bearded cowboy. "It did us good to see such a pretty bit of fist work. They wanted taking down a peg, both of 'em. I guess they won't slop over quite so often now."

Pete got up and seated himself at the head of the green table, around which the gamblers had gathered eagerly. He affected not to notice the man who had inflicted on him so humiliating a defeat, but calmly began the game as if nothing had happened to disturb the serenity of his temple of chance.

Bill, meanwhile, had come to his senses and stumbled groggily out of the room, to freshen up in the open air.

"That fellow will bear watching," muttered Wild Bill.

Not liking the look on the face of the ruffianly bar-
tender, as he crept from the room like a whipped cur, Hickok followed him, while Cody and the others watched the players.

First of all, the man fetched a bucket of cold water and bathed his aching head, which was still singing from the blows administered with such terrific force by Buf-

falo Bill.

When he had done this he rose to his feet, cursing savagely, and walked over to a barn about thirty yards from the house. He went into the barn, and reappeared in a few moments and flung himself down in the long grass by the side of the hut.

Scouting around cautiously, so that the man would have no chance to notice him, Wild Bill saw exactly what he had suspected.

The scoundrel had taken a rifle from the barn, in which he had his sleeping-quarters, and he was holding it to his shoulder, leveled straight at the brilliantly lighted doorway of the saloon.

His purpose was clearly to shoot Buffalo Bill when he appeared in the doorway.

It was a neatly contrived piece of villainy, and it would probably have succeeded had not Wild Bill read murder in the man's eyes.

Enraged by the cold-blooded deliberation of the ruf-

fian, Hickok drew his revolver, and was on the point of shooting him.

But a thought stayed his hand. He might—nay, he surely would—he accused of murdering the man. It would be better to expose him red-handed to the crowd in the saloon, and let them mete out Western justice to him.

Wild Bill, therefore, strolled back into the saloon, giving the man in the grass no sign that he had discovered his presence. As he passed through the doorway, he
could not help feeling uncomfortable at the thought that he might get a bullet in the back from the gun that was covering him. But no shot rang out.

As Wild Bill entered, his comrade came forward across the room to meet him.

"Don’t stand in line with the doorway," Hickok whispered hurriedly. "There’s a snake in the grass outside, and he’s got his sting out for you."

"Is that so?" said Buffalo Bill, comprehending the position at once. "I might have guessed as much."

"He’s lying in the grass by the barn, with his rifle covering the door. We’d better tell the gang, and have him captured."

"Wait a moment. I’m pretty sure there’s some crooked play going on at the table on the part of our tavern-keeping friend. Let’s see if we can catch him at it."

The friends moved over to the table and stood behind Faro Pete.

He turned round and gave them an evil scowl, but said nothing.

The men round the table were playing roulette, and the "bank," held by Pete, was winning heavily. It had been winning, with hardly a break, from the start of the game.

The gamblers’ faces alone were enough to show an onlooker that fact.

Some were flushed with anger, others pale with desperation, as they saw the savings of months swept away in a few minutes’ reckless plunging.

Presently Wild Bill looked inquiringly at his comrade, and the latter nodded. Lookers-on proverbially see most of the game, and they had seen quite enough to convince them that this game, at least, was not on the level.

Wild Bill suddenly seized Pete’s arms and pinned him down on the table, while at the same moment Cody walked over to the roulette wheel and examined it closely.

Several of the gamblers sprang to their feet, and one or two even drew their guns, evidently thinking for the moment that an attempt was being made to rob the bank.

But they soon guessed what was the matter when they saw Cody put his hands on the wheel.

They waited in breathless silence for his verdict.

Pete’s face turned the color of ashes, for in his imagination he could already feel the rope tightening round his neck. There was little mercy shown to cheats out West in those wild days, any more than to horse-thieves.

"As I supposed," said Buffalo Bill, presently. "This wheel is crooked."

At that a hoarse shout of rage went up from the infuriated gamblers.

"It’s a lie!" shrieked Pete, struggling vainly in Wild Bill’s strong arms.

"See for yourselves," said Cody briefly to the gamblers. "The banker can win whenever he likes with this wheel."

Three of the men examined it, and saw that he was right.

"Hang the crook!" cried one of them. "He’s been getting our money for months."

The cry was taken up eagerly, and the unlucky man would certainly have been lynched had not Buffalo Bill interfered in his behalf.

"There’s too much lynching," he declared. "It’s giving Texas a bad name. Let us give him a good flogging and run him out of town. That will be enough punishment, I reckon."

Some of the men demurred at first, but eventually Cody, backed up by his three friends, brought them round to his way of thinking.

"But there’s another durned skunk outside, who certainly does deserve to be strung up," Hickok declared, and he told the crowd about the would-be assassin lying outside in the grass.

"I guess he’s still there," said a cowboy. "Let two or three of us go out and make him throw up his hands. He won’t think we are onto his game until we have the drop on him."

Several of the gamblers volunteered for the task, and, led by Wild Bill, they had the scoundrel covered by half-a-dozen guns in a few moments.

He weakened at once, and surrendered without a fight.

Cody had hard work to save the man’s life, for even his companions were in favor of hanging him. But at last a compromise was made.

Both men were flogged so soundly that they could hardly stand, and were then ridden on a rail out of the settlement, and warned not to show their faces in the neighborhood again, unless they wanted to be shot on sight.

CHAPTER III.

AN ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION.

Three weeks after the scouts had cast in their lot with Jack Dixon and agreed to search for the lost treasure of the Aztecs, the four men pulled up their horses at the tavern of a small Mexican village situated about a hundred miles from the ranch of Don Ramon Mercado.

At Dixon’s request, they had agreed to visit the ranch before they struck out into the Yaqui country, as it was very little out of their way.

The young man had been pondering over the warning that Buffalo Bill had given him, and had decided that he would speak to Donna Dolores and find out whether his love was returned.

Dismounting from their horses, the four friends entered the tavern, a squalid adobe building that had very few pretensions to be considered as a hotel.

There was only one other guest at the place. He wa
sitting down at a table in the common room, and sipping \textit{aguadiente}, the native Mexican drink.

As Dixon entered, leading the way, he looked up, recognized him, and came forward, greeting the young man effusively.

"Ha, Señor Dixon!" he said, "it is a long time since we have seen you in this part of the country. We thought you had settled down in the United States for good, but Mexico seems to have an attraction for you still. But you are welcome—very welcome! Don Ramon Mercado and his beautiful daughter will be glad to see you. What has brought you down here this time—ranching or gold-mining?"

"I have come down on business, Dr. Lopez—private business," replied Dixon, responding to the other's effusive greeting with marked coldness. "Let me introduce you to my friends, Dr. Lopez—the Señors Cody, Hickok, and Wharton."

The three scouts acknowledged the introduction without any warmth. They could see that Dixon did not care to be friendly with the man he had met thus casually, and they took their cue from him.

Then, too, they took an aversion to the man at first sight. He was strikingly handsome in the dark Mexican way, but there was a sinister and shifty look about his eyes that suggested it would not be entirely safe to trust him.

He sat at the table for some time, chatting with them. It was noticeable that he was very anxious to find out what had brought Dixon back to Mexico. He did his best to "pump" him in an apparently careless manner, but Dixon carefully dodged his questions and left him no wiser than he was before.

At last, trying hard to conceal his disappointment, he rose to leave.

"I came over this way to see a patient," he said, as he made his adieu. "I have thirty miles to ride for home, and if I am to get there to-night, I must be moving. Adieu, Señor Dixon! We shall meet again, I hope—at the ranch of Don Ramon, if not before."

"Who is he?" asked Buffalo Bill, after the man had left the room. "You didn't seem to warm to him much, Dixon."

"Seemed to like him about as much as I like most redskins," observed Nick Wharton.

"Do not like him at all—that's a fact," said Dixon. "His name is Dr. Francisco Lopez, and he is a physician practising over a large stretch of country around Don Ramon's ranch. In fact, he is the only doctor in this part of the country. Rumor says that he dare not live in the cities because he is too well known to the police, and that is why he has to earn his living out here in the wilds, where there is little inducement for a doctor to settle."

"I didn't like his looks," remarked Wild Bill. "He seemed a shifty cuss."

"He bears a bad reputation. He is a gambler and worse, if half that is told of him is true. But no crimes have actually been proved against him. It is all a matter of rumor."

"But where there is so much smoke there is apt to be fire as well," said Cody. "The fellow seemed to be remarkably curious about your business."

"I'm a bit worried about that," confessed Jack. "I didn't mention it when I told you the story, but as a matter of fact this man Lopez was the doctor who attended the Aztec Atuahalpa when he died of yellow fever. Before he sank into his last fatal stupor, the old man was delirious, raving wildly about all sorts of things. Is it possible that Lopez can have learned the secret of the Aztec hoard from what he said in his delirium?"

"It is not only possible, but probable," said Buffalo Bill. "The old fellow would be more likely to rave about that than anything else. It was the thing that was dearest to his heart and most on his mind. It is quite on the cards that Lopez knows you have the key to the hidden treasure."

Dixon looked very grave as he realized the force of these suggestions.

"Then in that case," he remarked, "we have a subtle and dangerous foe to guard against. Lopez is a very clever man, and I don't believe he would stick at anything. We must be on our guard night and day."

Night had now fallen, and the four friends sat down to the wretched supper of greasy Mexican dishes which was the best that the tavern-keeper could set before them.

After they had finished, and the barefooted servant who waited on them had withdrawn, they sat around the table, talking in low, earnest tones about their expedition, the chances of its success, and the perils they must inevitably encounter.

They had the Spanish translation of the old Aztec's directions on the table before them, and from time to time they referred to it.

"Well, this is pretty dry work," said Wild Bill at last. "Let's have a drink to the success of the trip."

A bottle of whisky and some glasses had been left on the table by the Mexican servant, and Hickok poured out the drinks.

"Here's luck to the Aztec's heirs!" said Buffalo Bill, raising his own glass.

Before he could raise it to his lips, there was a flash of flame through the open window at the other end of the room, followed by the sharp crack of a revolver.

Smashed into a thousand pieces, the glass fell from Cody's hands.

Quick as a flash, the border king rushed toward the window, whipping out his ever-ready six-shooter from his belt as he did so.

He caught a momentary glimpse of a face distorted by
evil passions, and then there was another flash within a few feet of his eyes.

He reeled, and staggered back into the arms of his friends.

A few seconds later, the sound of a horse galloping away outside was heard.

"Are you shot, old pard?" Wild Bill asked anxiously.

"No, I think not," replied the border king, pulling himself together. "It was only the burnt powder stinging my face. Get after him, boys!"

But it was too late. Dixon and Nick Wharton rushed outside, but the man had disappeared into the darkness of the night.

It was hopeless to try to trail him before the dawn, and they agreed that then it would be too late, as hunting him down would take more time than they cared to waste.

When the two men returned to the room, they found that Cody had fully recovered. The bullet had passed through his hair, slightly grazing the scalp, but doing no other injury.

"Did you catch sight of the man at the window?" he asked Jack Dixon.

"Yes, for a second; but I did not see him distinctly."

"Did you recognize him?"

"I thought he was Lopez, but I would not like to swear to it in a court of law."

"I thought so, too. I reckon he was the man all right. He was spying on us. He saw the parchment on the table, and he must have guessed what we were talking about, even though we spoke in low tones."

"Then, when he heard Hickok and I talk out loud about the Aztec's treasure, he was sure. He could contain himself no longer. He conceived the mad idea of shooting us all down unawares, and then getting the chart of directions."

"I guess you've sized it up right, Cody," agreed Dixon. "And the scoundrel has got away! Depend upon it, we shall have more trouble with him."

The keeper of the tavern, alarmed by the sound of the shots, had got out of bed—for, like most Mexicans, he retired early—and he now came running into the room to ask "los Americanos" what was the matter.

When he was told, and asked sternly what he knew about Lopez, he turned pale and was evidently very ill at ease.

"Por Dios, señor," he said, "it is a dreadful thing to happen to a poor innkeeper to have his guests shot at so treacherously! It will give my tavern an ill name. I know nothing that is good of Senor Lopez. If I could have my will, he should never enter this tavern."

"Then why don't you keep him out?" asked Buffalo Bill bluntly.

"I dare not do that, señor," was the reply. "It would be as much as my life is worth. Señor Lopez is a violent man—a man whom it is ill to cross. But that is not all.

They say he is very friendly with the band of outlaws under Bernal Morales, which terrorizes this part of the country. If I were to offend one of Morales' friends, my tavern would be destroyed some dark night, and I should probably have my throat cut."

"That is all you know about the fellow?"

"Yes, señor."

"Did he ride toward his home, after he finished talking with us before dinner, as he said he would?"

"Yes, but of course I cannot tell whether he came back again to spy on you and attack you. His riding away may have been only a blind. That would be like the man. Good night señors."

And the landlord bowed himself out.

"This makes the matter worse," said Buffalo Bill. "If the fellow is in league with that gang of bandits, he will probably get their help to attack us."

"Yes, and it's a bad gang," said Dixon. "I have heard of it before. It has defied the Mexican authorities for years. We shall have to keep on our guard carefully every foot of the way."

"Of course," agreed the border king, "but I think the greatest danger will be when we are returning from the Yaqui country—not when we are going there."

"How do you make that out?"

"By reasoning what I would do myself if I were in the position of this fellow Lopez and wanted to carry out the same design. He got excited and lost his head when he fired at us. When he thinks over the matter calmly, he will see that the best thing he can do is to let us go to the Yaqui country and get the treasure—if we can."

"That would be much better than taking the great risk of doing so himself. It would be much less risky for him to attack us from some ambush, on our return, with his band of outlaws. Then he would get all our treasure, if he overcame us, without the hardship and peril of going into the Yaqui country for it."

The others agreed that Buffalo Bill's reasoning was sound, but they decided that none the less they would keep a good lookout from that time forward.

Pursuant to this resolution, one of them stayed on guard, by turns, all that night and every other night during the journey.

Nothing more happened that night, and early in the morning they went on their way to Don Ramon's ranch.

CHAPTER IV.

DONNA DOLORES IS CARRIED OFF.

Two days later, toward the close of a hard day's riding over prairie country, Buffalo Bill and his comrades came in sight of a large and handsome building standing in the midst of a grove of trees.

"That is the hacienda," said Jack Dixon, pointing toward it and urging his horse to a gallop.
“The young feller’s mighty anxious ter get ter his sweetheart,” grunted old Nick Wharton, as he followed at a quieter pace. “Mebbe he’ll be jest as eager ter get away from her when he’s been married a year. Thet’s the way with most married men I’ve known.”

But the welcome which young Dixon received when he drew near the hacienda was very different from that which he had expected.

A farm laborer came running out from the house to greet him, and a single glance at the man’s face showed that something was wrong.

“Praise be to the saints that you have come, Señor Dixon!” said the man eagerly. “You are needed here badly.”

“What is the matter?”

“Donna Dolores has been carried off by the Yaquis.” Dixon’s face turned the color of chalk and for a moment he reeled in the saddle. Then he pulled himself together and asked:

“Where is Don Ramon?”

“He is in his bed in the house. He cannot move from it, for he was badly wounded by the Yaquis.”

“I will go to him,” said Dixon, swinging himself off his horse. “You see those three gentlemen who are riding toward the house, after me? They are Americans, and my friends. Look after their horses and offer them refreshment. Then conduct them to Don Ramon’s room.”

With a heavy heart, Jack sought his former employer. He found him lying in bed, with his face as white as the pillow on which his head rested. There was a look of despair stamped on his features, but his eyes lit up when he saw the young man.

Slowly and painfully he extended his hand and grasped Dixon by the sleeve of his hunting jacket.

“You have heard?” he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

“Yes. How did it happen?”

“Dolores and I were riding on the eastern edge of the ranch, the day before yesterday. Suddenly we were ambushed by a dozen Yaquis who had hidden themselves in some thick brushwood. I shot down two of them with my revolver, but they were too close to us to make any effective resistance possible. I was wounded by a couple of arrows, knocked on the head, and left for dead.

“Some of the peons found me, still unconscious, a few hours later. There was no sign of Dolores. Of course the Indians had carried her off. I did not become conscious until yesterday. I tried to get up and search for her, but fell into another swoon. Now I cannot move from this bed, or even sit up.”

“Has anybody pursued the Yaquis?” asked Jack.

“Yes. Twenty of the peons have gone after them—all that could be spared from the ranch. But I have little hope they will find her and get her away from the Indians. You know what kind of men they are—not very intelligent and not overfond of taking risks.”

“Yes.”

“And then, too, they are not expert in following trails. The Yaquis will be able to hide their tracks.”

“Take comfort, Don Ramon,” said Jack. “We must not give way to despair. I have with me the most famous scout and trapper in the United States—the great Buffalo Bill, of whom you must have heard even in this out-of-the-way part of Mexico. With us there are also two other scouts, who are almost as expert as Buffalo Bill in the tracking of Indians. The four of us will take the trail and do all that men can do to rescue Donna Dolores.”

Don Ramon pressed his hand gratefully.

“What brought you and your friends down here?” he asked faintly.

“We came to search for the lost treasure of the Aztecs, which Atualalpa told us about. He gave me the key to it before he died.”

“Ah, but you will search for Dolores first?”

“Most surely. Don Ramon, I would do so out of my liking for you, and in return for the kindness you always showed me. I would do so because a woman is in danger and needs help. But I have a more powerful motive than either of those. Don Ramon, I love Dolores. I have loved her for years.”

The Mexican looked at him intently for a moment.

“So that was why you left the ranch!” he said. “You would not speak. You thought I was too rich. But I rate honesty and bravery far above wealth. I would have gladly consented that you should wed Dolores. Now, alas! she is lost, and in terrible danger. Rescue her, and you will find no opposition from me, whether you win the lost treasure of the Aztecs or not.”

“We will save her, if it can be done by mortal man,” Jack replied.

At this point Buffalo Bill and his two companions entered the room. They had thoughtfully waited for a few minutes, to allow their young friend the chance to talk alone with his old friend and employer.

Dixon introduced them to the rancher, and told them what had happened.

“Of course we will do all we can,” said Buffalo Bill. “There is no time to lose, for the trail is already old. But we will follow it right to the village of the Yaquis, if necessary. It is not likely that they will harm the girl. They have evidently no idea of killing her, or they would have done so on the spot, without putting themselves to the trouble of carrying her off.”

“They may have reserved her for the torture,” groaned the unhappy father.

“That is not likely,” said Jack. “She is probably to be made the squaw of some chief of the tribe. That is a fate from which we must rescue her. Death were preferable.”

“Let us waste no time in talk,” put in Buffalo Bill. “We will have a bite to eat, and then ride at once to pick up the trail. Send one of your peons with us, Don
Ramón, to show us the place where the Yaquis made their attack."

They rode as hastily as they could to the spot, for Buffalo Bill wanted to investigate the trail and see whether it would be possible to follow it during the night, which would be illuminated by the bright light of a tropical moon.

When they reached the place, the scouts were disappointed and angered to find that the _peons_ who had been sent in pursuit had carelessly trampled over the original trail with their horses’ hoofs: In some places the tracks made by the Yaquis were entirely obliterated for long distances, and scouts less expert than Buffalo Bill and his comrades would have been at a loss to follow them.

When they were in the midst of their difficulties, Dixon suggested that it would be easy enough to follow the trail made by the _peons._

"That would be all right if we were sure that the _peons_ would stick to the trail of the Yaquis," remarked Buffalo Bill: "But that is just what they are not likely to do. Such careless trackers could not hold to a straight trail, much less to one that the Indians will undoubtedly try to hide. No, if we follow the _peons_ we shall go astray. We must follow the trail of the Yaquis, and nothing else."

And all through the night Buffalo Bill followed it, aided by Wild Bill and Nick Wharton, without once going astray. But it was slow work, for they were obliged to travel afoot most of the time, leading their horses, and with their eyes fixed closely on the ground. The Yaquis had undoubtedly got a great start of them and were increasing it all the time. The tracks showed that they were all well mounted, and were pushing their horses along at a good pace.

The trail was followed throughout the next day at a canter, and toward noon Buffalo Bill pointed out where the _peons_ had lost it and gone off at an angle in the wrong direction.

"It rests with us to save the girl now," he said. "They are out of the race, as I thought they would be."

"And the savages have got such a long start of us!" groaned Jack Dixon.

"Never say die, lad!" replied Cody. "We will follow them over their mountains to the shores of the Caribbean Sea, but we will save her!"

At last, as they rode into the foot-hills of a great range of mountains that marked the border of the Yaquis' territory, they came to a place where the trail they were following divided.

The party had split up into halves, each of which had gone off in an opposite direction. After examining both trails carefully, Buffalo Bill had to admit that he was at a loss to say which party had carried the girl along.

"One thing is fairly certain," he said. "They will join forces again, probably at or near their village. We must divide also. Two of us will follow each trail. At the end of both trails we ought to come together again. We had better defer attempts at rescue until we meet again, unless, of course, some good chance presents itself."

The others agreed to the suggestions of the border king, and it was decided that Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill should follow the trail that bore away to the right, while Nick Wharton and Jack followed that to the left.

It was with a heavy heart that the four friends ate their final meal together. They were going to brave the dead-liest danger, and they knew very well that when they parted they might never see one another again.

Their stout hearts did not quail with any personal fear, but they said good-by sadly; for they feared for one another.

CHAPTER V.

CAUGHT BY THE YAQUIS.

On the second evening after parting from their friends, Nick Wharton and Jack Dixon came to the end of the trail they were following.

It led them in sight of a large village of the Yaquis. As they gazed at it cautiously from cover, they saw that it contained over two hundred wigwams, and doubtless as many, if not more, brave.

They had not come in sight of the party they were following, and they knew that, with the start it had got, it must have entered the village at least a day ahead of them.

They scouted carefully around the village until dusk fell, but they could find no trace of their two comrades, nor could they tell whether the party they had followed had brought Dolores with it.

Dixon was naturally impatient to settle this matter at once, but Nick Wharton, wise in all the points of frontier craft, said that they must wait until after dark before they approached near to the village and tried to find out what was happening there.

"I know ye air all on fire ter help the gal," said old Nick, "an' I'm free ter admit that I feel the same way myself. But that's nuthin' ter be gained by lettin' the Yaquis kill us right off. Thet won't set the gal free. We've got ter show cunning here. A bold attack on 'em would be sheer madness."

Jack saw the force of this reasoning, and was obliged to agree, although he chafed sorely under the delay.

It was not until about eight o'clock in the evening, when the camp-fires were blazing brightly in the village and the Yaquis were dancing around them after their evening meal, that Nick would agree to creep in, under cover of brushwood and long grass, and see what could be discovered.

Jack followed him, a few paces behind, moving as
silently as he could; but the wary old scout was obliged to stop several times and caution him that he must make less noise.

At last, silently as a serpent, Nick wormed his way through the grass to a thick mass of brush not more than thirty yards away from the principal camp-fire on the edge of the village. Jack was by his side in a few moments, and they lay down behind the bushes, securely screened from the sight of at least two-score of Indians, who were dancing wildly around the camp-fire.

The braves kept up the dance for more than half-an-hour, only pausing now and then to take a long drink from a gourd full of some intoxicating beverage which they brewed from the yams they cultivated when they were not raiding their white neighbors.

Eventually, however, even their iron frames were tired out by the exhausting dance, and they desisted and lay panting on the ground for several minutes.

When he had recovered his breath, one of them, who seemed to be the chief, judging by the many ornaments on his dress, got to his feet and beat loudly on a calabash drum which was suspended by a cord round his neck.

This brought the warriors to attention. They rose from the ground, and seated themselves in a circle—as dignified now as they had before been wildly excited.

Nick Wharton knew enough of the ways of Indians to guess that a council on some important matter was about to be held.

He was not disappointed.

In a loud voice, the Yaqui chief called out:

"Let the white girl be brought hither. We will decide her fate now."

Two of the warriors at once rose from the circle and went to a gaily-adorned wigwam about two hundred yards away. They returned in a few moments, leading between them a young white girl of remarkable beauty, in whom Jack Dixon instantly recognized Dolores.

He gave a start, but in a second old Nick Wharton gripped him savagely by the arm, as a warning to him to keep still.

The girl was taken into the circle and seated on a blanket in the center of it, opposite to the chief.

A hot argument at once broke out among the Indians as to what should be done with her. Some of the more savage among them wanted to put her to death by torture, but the chief wished to take her for his wife, and most of the warriors were willing to let him have his way.

Nick Wharton found, to his great surprise, that he could quite well understand all that was said. The Yaquis did not speak a dialect of their own, but a rude Spanish patois which was almost exactly the same as that which he had picked up during his long intercourse with other Indian tribes in Mexico, lower California, and Arizona.

At last the Yaquis settled that the girl should be the squaw of the chief, and that the marriage should take place on the following day according to the rites and customs of the tribe.

Then, as the order was given to lead her back to the wigwam from which she had been brought, Dolores broke silence for the first time.

"I will never marry you," she said firmly, looking boldly and unflinchingly at the chief. "If you try to force me to it, I will die, rather."

The Yaqui chief laughed brutally.

"The paleface girl will be the squaw of Iron Hand, and she will learn to love the great chief," he retorted. "Then she will tell him all the secrets of her people, and Iron Hand will be able to fight against them and win many victories."

"Never!"

Iron Hand made a sign to his warriors, and the girl was at once led from the circle.

Jack looked at Nick Wharton beseechinglly, mutely asking whether they could not make a dash and try to get the girl out of the hands of the Indians. Their horses were tethered at a distance of fully five hundred yards, however, in a clump of trees; and the old scout knew that it would be the sheerest folly to make the attempt now.

They must wait for a more favorable opportunity, which would present itself later in the night, when all the warriors save the few sentries had retired to rest in their wigwams.

Motioning to the young man to be as quiet as he could, Nick led the way back toward the cover where they had left the horses. He intended to stay there until the village was quiet, as they were too likely to be detected where they were, so near to the chief camp-fire. He had learned all he wanted to know—where the girl was kept prisoner—and now he could bide his time until the opportunity to rescue her arrived.

But, in making these calculations, he had left out of account the fact that his companion was far inferior to himself in the craft of the scout and frontiersman. Jack had not advanced twelve yards on his hands and knees before he broke a dry stick with a loud crack that was caught by the keen ears of the Yaquis who were sitting round the fire near by.

In a few seconds both men were surrounded by their foes.

Even in this dangerous predicament old Nick Wharton did not lose his coolness.

"Surrender!" he shouted instantly to Jack. "Don't try to fight. It's no use."

Jack took the advice, and in a few moments both men were tightly bound.

They were taken to an empty wigwam on the farther
edge of the village and thrown into it, with many blows, insults, and curses.

Their situation was now indeed desperate. Both their hands and their feet were tied with rawhide cords that bit into the very flesh. On the morrow they would doubtless be tortured to death.

Jack bitterly blamed himself for the carelessness which had brought them into this plight.

"Don't worry, lad," said dauntless old Nick Wharton. "Things are looking purty good, it seems ter me. Hyar we are in the village, an' the gal is safe, so far. All we've got to do is ter get free, get her out o' that wigwam on the other side o' the village, an' then all go off together."

"All right!" echoed Jack, in bitter despair. "Isn't it enough?"

"Air yer teeth good, boy?" asked the old scout.

Without another word, he lifted his bound hands up to his mouth and began to chew slowly and strongly at the tough rawhide thongs.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

Jack was prompt to follow his companion's example, as soon as he caught the idea. But, in spite of his youth, his teeth were not as strong as those of the old scout, which were veritable wolf-fangs.

Yet it was difficult work for even old Nick Wharton to saw through that tough rawhide. It was over an hour before the cords parted and his hands were at liberty.

After resting for awhile and rubbing his hands vigorously together to restore the circulation that had been impeded by the tightness of his bonds, Nick untied his feet. Then he turned to his companion, to see how he had progressed.

Jack had made little impression on the strong hide, but he said that his teeth were aching from their futile efforts.

Nick laughed, and promptly undid his bonds. Left to himself, Jack would have been forced to remain a prisoner until daylight destroyed the chance of escape. But it was hard work to keep the old scout in captivity. Many an Indian tribe had tried it, but none had been successful for very long.

"What shall we do next?" asked Jack.

"Speak softly. There may be a gold-dusted redskin on guard outside the teepee. Let us see."

Very cautiously, Nick Wharton lifted the skin curtain which closed the entrance to the lodge, and looked out.

There was a Yaqui brave sitting, with his back turned to the door, at a distance of about six paces.

Nick watched him for a time, and listened to his heavy and regular breathing.

"He's asleep," he said to Jack, drawing back into the wigwam. "But I reckon that, like most Injuns, he sleeps purty light. We must get rid of him somehow."

"What do you mean? Kill him?"

Nick pondered for a few moments.

"I wouldn't have no scruples, under the circumstances," he said. "But I guess it ain't good policy. He might give a death yell that would alarm the camp. No, I'll gag him."

The scout picked up a blanket from the floor of the wigwam and cautiously advanced on the sentry, holding it in his hands.

In spite of the noiselessness of his movements, the Indian stirred uneasily, as if he was aware, even in his sleep, that danger threatened.

Before he could wake up, however, the scout had flung the blanket over his head and drawn it tightly, completely muffling any sound that he might make.

Assisted by Jack, Wharton pulled the redskin inside the wigwam and took possession of the knife and tomahawk in his belt.

Holding the knife to the man's throat, he threatened to kill him if he made a movement or uttered a single sound.

The Indian glared savagely when the blanket was removed from his head, but he had the good sense to know when he was beaten, and to obey the command of the scout.

Nick Wharton gagged him with a piece of cloth torn from the blanket, and then tied his hands and feet with the very cords with which he had himself been bound. Jack noticed that he tied the brave's hands behind him. He did not intend that the redskin should use his teeth, as he himself had done.

"Nuthin' like experience fur teachin' ye things," remarked old Nick grimly.

When they were both ready to leave the wigwam, the scout looked out carefully and saw that the village was very quiet. The camp-fires had died down to mere heaps of smoldering embers, and all the braves seemed to be asleep in their wigwams.

"We'll soon wake 'em up," he said grimly, to his companion.

"What on earth do you mean? Surely you don't want to wake them up. It would be madness. What we want to do is to find Dolores and then get away as quietly as we can."

"I'm afraid you don't know much about Injuns and Injun villages, my lad," returned the old trapper. "If we air ter hev a chance ter escape at all, we must wake the varmints up."

"Well, it's beyond me," confessed Jack, "but I guess you've got a good scheme all right."

"It's this way, boy. We hev ter go ter the corral whar the Injuns keep thar hosses. We want one fur the gal, an' it would be wise ter take three others, so thet we'll all hev an extray mount. Then, with our own hosses, which
air hobbled in the timber, we ought ter be all right when the reds pursue us, as they air sure ter do."

"That's all right, but why can't we get the horses from the corral without waking up the village?"

"Because of the dogs. I took care ter hev a peep at that corral from a respectful distance, and I see ten dogs around it. You kin bet all Texas ter a hick'ry nut that them dogs ain't goin' ter let us take three horses without makin' a noise that 'ud wake the dead."

"That's why we must make a noise ourselves, boy—or, rather, make the Injuns make one. Then, when they hear the dogs yelpin', they won't at once rush ter the corral. We'll give them other things ter think of."

"And how will you do that?"

"Easy enough. Jest set fire ter a few wigwams an' do a bit o' yellin'. The Injuns will think they air attacked by some o' their enemies. I guess they've got plenty, besides the Mexicans. Then, in the confusion, we kin get the horses from the corral an' make our escape."

"I'll go to the gal's wigwam an' set her free. You stay behind an' set fire ter some o' the wigwams on this side o' the village. As soon as they air alight, make hot-foot fur the corral. You'll find us thar. I must go arter the gal, because that may be a brave on guard, an' I reckon I kin settle his hash better than you kin. Start settin' fire ter the wigwams in about five mints. Hev you any matches?"

"Yes. I'll follow your instructions to the letter."

Old Nick silently stole through the village, and, as he expected, found a brave on guard outside the wigwam in which Dolores was a prisoner. He crept up behind the man silently, and stunned him with a heavy blow with the flat of his tomahawk.

Stepping inside the teepee, he found that Dolores was asleep, with her hands and feet bound. It was the work of a moment to cut her bonds and awaken her. To his delight, she did not cry out, for she was a brave and cool girl.

"Who are you?" she asked, looking at the grizzled old scout in amazement.

"A friend. Come with me. Do not be afraid. I come from your father to set you free."

Dolores followed him without a word, but her eyes spoke eloquently of the gratitude she felt.

Suddenly flames shot high into the air from the other side of the village, and Nick knew that Jack had succeeded in his task of firing the wigwams.

He at once set off at a run for the corral, dragging the girl along with him by the hand.

It was the work of a few moments to secure four of the nearest horses, regardless of the yelping of the dogs, who made quite as much noise as the old scout had prophesied they would.

Meanwhile, the village was in commotion. Braves poured out of all the wigwams, looking eagerly for the supposed enemy. Finding none, they set to work to try and put out the fire of the blazing wigwams.

Nick waited impatiently for Jack, and at last he saw him come tearing along, running for dear life, with Iron Hand and half-a-dozen of the Yaquis at his heels.

Nick instantly swung the girl on to the back of one horse, and vaulted into the saddle of another.

"Ride fur yer life!" he shouted. "This way, Jack! Here's a horse!"

The young man gave a glance in the direction of the scout, and then deliberately turned off at right angles, and vanished into the darkness.

Nick waited for nothing more. He dashed Dolores' horse over the quarters with a mule quirt that he found hanging to his saddle, and the animal bounded forward like an arrow from the bow.

Nick followed, just as Iron Hand and the Yaquis came dashing up.

The chief fired an arrow at him, but missed. Then he rushed into the corral, took out his own horse—an animal of fine speed and stamina—and gave chase, followed by several of his braves, who swiftly mounted.

"Faster—faster!" urged the old scout, as he drew alongside of Dolores.

"I can't; the horse is doing his best. He is not much good."

"The chief is gaining on us."

As he spoke, Iron Hand fired another arrow, which whizzed deep into the flesh of Dolores' horse.

The gallant animal staggered on for a few more strides, and then sank dead.

Nick Wharton put his arm round the girl's waist and pulled her on to his own steed before hers could sink beneath her. Lashing the horse, he went on, but the chief still gained. Nick's animal could not well sustain the double weight at that terrific pace.

There was only one thing to do, and the gallant old scout did not hesitate to do it.

He sat Dolores in front of him, and then, slackening the speed of the horse for a moment, slipped down to the ground.

"Ride on," he said. "I'll try and keep Iron Hand busy fur a time, ef I don't stop him altogether."

"No!" cried the girl. "I will not let you sacrifice yourself for me."

For answer, Nick Wharton lashed the horse violently with the mule quirt.

The pained and frightened animal took the bit between its teeth and galloped away with the girl, who could not pull up, try as hard as she might.

In a few moments Nick was at hand-grips with Iron Hand, but the chief was almost immediately reenforced by a dozen of his braves, and the scout was speedily overpowered.
CHAPTER VII.
THE CAVE IN THE ROCKS.

When the young rancher parted from his companions it was his intention to attract the attention of the Indians, and give Nick Wharton a chance to escape with the girl. It was also his plan to secure a horse, by doubling back again, and join them. In that he was frustrated. The fire burned more rapidly than he expected—the light reached a greater distance, and the startled Indians had too quickly given their attention to the safety of the prisoners.

But the cries of disappointed revenge told him that his old friend had been successful, and was carrying the girl away with him. Satisfied of this he began to think of his own critical situation.

Fortunately for him, the majority of the Indians had followed after the other fugitives, and as soon as he was at a short distance from the blazing wigwams, he was in comparative safety. Yet there was nothing to assure him of this, and he hastened on with what speed he might until he came to a cliff overlooking a valley below the village.

All was dark and dreary, but he began looking for a safe place to descend, without losing precious time by going around; for up the bold rock upon which he stood not even a serpent could have crawled.

Climbing to the gnarled roots of a tree that found stunted life upon the brow of the precipice, he drew himself along foot by foot, not daring to go back or expose himself.

Often he slipped, and was suspended from the dizzy height by clinging with his hands to some frail root or branch, whose giving away would cause him to fall—how far he shuddered to think.

Yet, for all his toil and danger, he had not descended in the least, and, to render his situation still more desperate, he suddenly found his farther progress arrested. Yawning before him, he saw a deep chasm—a cleft in the old mossy rocks so deep that, active as he was, he dared not attempt to leap.

Crouching down, he bent over and endeavored to penetrate the gloom, but in vain. All that he could determine was that the ravine appeared to grow wider at the bottom.

Despairing of fathoming it or leaping over it, he would have turned back, had he not fancied that he heard the cries of pursuing enemies.

He measured the distance again carefully with his eyes, and shook his head in doubt. Still, he could not stand thus idly. Something must be done, and that quickly. He glanced up and down the chasm, to learn if there was not some place more narrow—some point where his chances of success would be better.

He could distinguish no difference in the width, and just as he was bracing his nerves to try the fearful leap, he saw, at some distance, a tree that bent over the gulf and reached half-way across it. The light of hope flashed again in his eyes.

He gained the promised means of safety, and made a careful examination. The tree had long been dead—had fallen from age and decay. Still, it was the only possible means of distilling his pursuers, whom he could now plainly hear.

He carefully crept out upon the swaying trunk. Lower and lower it sunk for a time, and then remained groaning and quivering as he swiftly passed toward the topmost branches. He looked behind and saw that the sapless roots were giving way one after another.

He looked forward as he reached the extreme end, prepared himself and jumped with all his strength—struck upon the edge—slipped—renewed his hold—hung swinging in the air, and then succeeded, by an almost superhuman effort, in reaching a firm place, just as the tree fell with a noise like thunder, and the air was filled with clouds of dust and dozens of birds that had been swept from their roots.

A fervent prayer of thankfulness rose from his lips as he thought of his narrow escape. Tearing off his hunting-shirt, he found a dry limb, wrapped it around it and hurled it to the bottom.

There was cunning in the act. It was one worthy of old Nick Wharton himself, as the result soon proved.

Scarcely had he hidden before the faces of half-a-dozen Indians peeped out from the opposite side, drew near, and looked down into the black pit—saw the shattered tree and the hunting-shirt, and drew back satisfied. There was not a doubt in their minds that the white man had attempted to cross upon the trunk, that it had given way, and that both had been crushed into atoms at the bottom.

The quick wit and courage of the young man had saved him, and, as soon as his enemies had disappeared, he began looking around.

Though he had reached a point that was covered by bushes, yet they but fringed the broad flat rock he had seen from the other side. Skirting along its edge for a little distance, he found an easy means of descent—so easy and regular that he was certain it had been often used before.

Near the center of the level plain was a curious pyramid, built of human bones, surmounted by a grizzly skull—a pile six feet in height and so placed as to be distinctly seen from all sides.

There was also a pile of stones constructed after the manner of a white man's oven, with a thick flat one for the cover, moldy and stained.

"By the heavens above!" exclaimed Jack; and he turned pale at the thought, "this must be one of those altars I've heard the friendly Indians speak of, and that pile must be the bones of the poor wretches that have been sacrificed by the Yaquis to the god they call—"
THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

The stone fell into its place. I was too old and feeble to raise it, and I am dying from hunger and thirst. My car tells me that you are a paleface; but, for the sake of the Manitou, give me food and drink!"

"Certainly, but first tell me who you are?"

"I cannot—cannot! My lips are sealed—give me water—water!"

"Where can I find any?"

"Towards the rising sun, half an arrow-shot."

The trapper picked up a bark cup, sprang out of the cave, and hastened to procure the life-giving fluid. But he was some time in finding the craftily-concealed spring, and when he returned the soul of the Indian had been summoned beyond the dark river.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MEDICINE-MAN.

Though Iron Hand, the great chief of the Yaquis, had shot at and ridden down old Nick Wharton, and it had been his determination to carry away his scalp fastened to his girdle, yet the instant he saw that the girl had escaped, his purpose changed, and, disarming Nick, he bound his hands.

It would not do to lose both prisoners. There was the possibility that the girl might meet some wandering people of her own blood, and be saved. If so, and he sacrificed Nick Wharton to his vengeance, who would there be to satisfy that of his tribe?

"Let the paleface get up!" he commanded, as soon as the flying girl had disappeared from sight, and he could sufficiently control his temper to speak in the firm voice worthy of his position.

"Waal," replied Nick Wharton, composedly, "I don't know as thar am any use in lyin' hyar. But yer needn't crow over yer victory. I suppose yer intend ter take me back ter yer village an' kill me arter yer own brutal fashion—that's it, bain't it?"

The Indian nodded his head in acquiescence, with a gratified smile breaking the stern lines of his mouth.

Nick Wharton continued:

"Ef that ar the case, I want ter be in as good shape as I kin, and die like er man; and so ef it ain't too much of er favor, I wish you'd take yer knife and dig out ther lead. It kinder grates agin' my shoulder-blade."

Iron Hand looked at him long and earnestly to see that no treachery was intended, gave a grunt of assent, motioned him to lie down, and at once performed the rude surgical operation.

"Now jest gather a few plantain leaves and bind them on, and mebbe I'll be all right agin' ther time when yer wants ter send my soul out of this world."

So well had he borne the intensely painful operation that he forced the respect of the savage, and though it

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it! I've often heard them spoken of before, but I never expected to see one. If I get safely out of this scrape I'll come back some day and bury the bones and take some powder and blow up the whole concern. Hello! What's that?"

He started back in alarm. For the first time in his life, terror took possession of him, and his stalwart frame quivered like an aspen leaf.

"Haunted! May Heaven have mercy upon me! It must be the ghosts of the poor dead men. Their bones have never been buried. I wouldn't be here in the night time for all the gold in the world."

A dismal groan caused him to quickly change his place, for the sound came directly from under his feet.

"What, more of them! I shouldn't wonder if there was a whole graveyard down-stairs, and—but there it is again. But that doesn't sound as if it came from a dead man. Who can tell but what there may be some poor fellow confined down in the rocks until they are ready to kill and burn him."

Filled with this new idea, some little of his fear vanished, and, drawing near again to the altar of sacrifice, he looked around and under it. And very soon he became convinced that the horrible sounds came from beneath it, and that there must be some hidden communication with a cave.

By the exercise of immense strength he removed one stone after another, and found that his idea was correct—that one of the stones, and the most massive of all, had been used as a door. It had been so placed as to conceal a rude pair of stairs. And now, as he could plainly distinguish the tones of a human voice, his courage returned, and, descending, he very soon came to a cave of considerable extent.

But, for all the bracing of his nerves, he was nearly retreating again, for never did mortal eye rest upon a more hideous, ghastly object.

Whether it was man or demon he could not for the moment determine; but his first thought was that he had gained the vestibule of the lower regions. In an instant, however, the well-known Spanish patois used by the Yaquis reassured him. Becoming convinced that it was no evil spirit, his pulse became calmer, and he advanced nearer to the object.

It was a man, he saw—or, what once had been—one though now bowed by age, and at the very last stage of starvation.

"In the name of goodness!" asked the astonished young rancher, as he stepped forward toward the corner in which the living skeleton was lying upon the cold and bare rock, almost devoid of clothing, "how came you to be shut up here?"

The wretched moaning ceased for a moment, and the fleshless jaws and the parched tongue managed to articulate:
was an unheard-of thing, Iron Hand lowered his dignity sufficiently to comply with the request.

"The paleface now will go," said the Indian, and sternly pointed to the place where the wigwams of his people were situated.

It was not long before they were met by another party of mounted braves—Iron Hand had sent those with him after the girl—and the chief, giving Nick Wharton into the care of a picked half-dozen, with the strongest possible commands to look to his safety, took one of the horses, and, followed by the rest, dashed swiftly again on the prairie.

It was a long distance back to the point from which he had started, and Nick Wharton on the way was told that the young trapper had fallen down a precipice while attempting to cross upon a rotten tree and been instantly dashed to pieces.

The strict orders of the chief forbade Nick Wharton's guard from taking his life, as they would most gladly have done, yet it was with great difficulty that they restrained the rest of the tribe from doing so when they came to the village.

Indeed, so fierce was the tumult, that even the commands of the chief would have been disregarded had not the great medicine-man of the tribe suddenly walked into the circle and forbidden the sacrifice.

This was done without a single word, merely by the waving of his hand, and those who had been the loudest in their outcries a moment before now shrank back trembling with fear. Familiar as they were with his presence at such times, yet they had never seen him so deeply loaded with the trappings and paint that betoken death.

In addition to his customary garments of skin and feathers, that swept to his feet, the shaggy hide of a wolf was closely drawn around his face, which, like his hands, were as black as night, save for a circle of crimson that surrounded his eyes, giving a hideous expression to a countenance never otherwise than ugly.

The staff upon which he leaned, and which was sufficiently strong for a weapon of defense, was twisted around with skins of serpents, and the dry scales clashed together at every movement, in strange discord to the jangling of bells that fringed his robes.

That his purpose was deadly was clearly shown by the manner in which he had arrayed himself, and the more superstitious bowed their heads as he walked slowly past, and crept away to whisper of the horrid deeds he meditated.

Not that they feared that he would entirely rob the prisoner of life, but they were confident that he had devised some new means of torture through which he would make him pass—some hitherto unknown and mysterious pain that they shuddered even to think of.

Every action on his part gave proof that such was the case. He motioned them to a neighboring wigwam, followed, and saw that the prisoner was bound as one had never been before.

Then he looked carefully to see that there were no chinks in the covering save the little opening above—bade them by signs bring some robes and fasten them around, saw that they were pinned strongly to the ground—examined the thus doubly-screened wigwam again and again, as he walked around it, and even yet did not appear to be satisfied that it would be proof against keen eyes.

What could he mean by such preparations for secrecy? Nick Wharton felt a strange fear creeping over him. He was familiar with all the usual means of torture, but never had seen anything like this, and he could not help thinking:

"I wonder what that old demon is a-go'in' ter do? He intends ter kill me by inches. Waal, waal, there ain't no means of escape, and I s'pose I've got ter bear it. But I'd a thousand times rather stand my chance fightin' a hundred warriors on er open prairie than be shut up here. That's something in it I can't understand nohow."

After the medicine-man had completed all his arrangements for secrecy, he appeared to be in no hurry to take advantage of them, for he coolly sat down, drew forth his pipe, and began smoking.

Then he slowly arose, and with the point of his staff traced a circle around, and at some distance from the wigwam, and by motions told the red men that it was charmed, and that any one who dared to enter would instantly be struck dead by the Evil Spirit.

"But why are you dumb?" questioned one of the fiery braves, who chafed against this restraint.

The medicine-man made signs which the Indians took to mean that he had taken a vow not to speak until some task had been accomplished. Drawing still farther back, they waited with the utmost impatience the next scene in that strange drama. But everything that followed was shut from their eyes.

The old trickster—after having procured some blazing embers from the nearest fire—walked into the wigwam, carefully shut the door behind him, and fastened it securely.

There was an interval of the most painful silence, and then strange waves of smoke arose and stole out through the opening at the top and floated in waves of blue and green in the sunshine, while the sulphurous smell nearly strangled those who were nearest.

Another interval of silence followed, so profound that they could almost hear the beating of their own hearts, and then faint moans could be heard issuing from the lips of the prisoner. But soon they increased to yells—to the utterances of one in the most terrible agony. They continued for several minutes, died away, were resumed, grew fainter, and at last ceased entirely.

But though nothing could be heard, every eye remained
fixed upon the wigwam. The horrible mystery that had been enacted there exercised a spell over them that they could not break.

Warriors, squaws and children seated themselves upon the ground, neglectful of everything else, until the door was again thrust aside and the medicine-man came reeling out into the open air.

He dropped the heavy skins over the doorway and forbade by signs any of the savages to approach the wigwam.

The medicine-man again drew the mystic circle around the prison wigwam, and then slowly disappeared in the woods in the same direction from which he had come, and the savages were left to the pangs of conjecture and ungratified curiosity, vainly asking each other what horrible deed had been done.

CHAPTER IX.
FRIGHTENING A CHIEF.

As soon as the medicine-man had passed out of the sight of the group who were gazing at the wigwam, from which he had recently issued, and he was satisfied that none was watching, he hid away until the return of the chief and the girl he was pursuing, so that he could conveniently listen.

Then he threw aside his rigidity of manner and his slow steps, and passed as rapidly along as if only a score of years had left their snows in his hair and wrinkles upon his forehead. Indeed, so rapid were his movements, that very few even of the younger warriors could have kept pace with him.

He went straight to the cave in the rocks, disappeared in its depths, returned with an armful of dry wood, re-built the altar, and kindled a fire, the blaze of which could be seen for miles around.

Then he descended again, guided by the light from above, and made a careful examination of the mysteries of the cavern, looking for and diving into secret hiding-places, and bringing forth the proceeds of many years of theft.

His investigation was not finished when he heard the sound of footsteps. Taking up the emaciated corpse of the famished man, he seated it in a corner, threw a robe around it so as to almost conceal the ghastly features, and, hiding behind it, awaited the coming of the intruder.

But whoever it was that came, he hesitated for some time before venturing below. When he at length did so, it was as one who was momentarily expecting to receive some sudden shock. Brave as he was, even Iron Hand—for it was the chief—trembled as he looked around, saw the confused mass of plunder strewn over the floor, and the grim figure in the corner.

"What would the chief of the Yaquis with the medicine man of the tribe?" asked the voice—the hidden living speaking for the exposed dead.

"The warriors of the red man said that you would speak with me," was the reply.

"And for this you dared to come to the place where, with exceeding fasting and prayer, I wait for the teachings of the Great Spirit?"

"I sought in vain in other places."

"And, like a squaw, had not the power to wait! Be-gone! Yet stay. It is better that we should talk here than in any other place. Listen intently to what I would say. You would wed one whose skin is fair as that of the lily of the valley, and hair as soft as silk of the maize? She is the paleface girl. Have you recaptured her?"

"Yes, Iron Hand and his braves rode her down. The heart of the chief has warmed toward her. She is his captive, and by the laws of the tribe he can do with her as he wills."

"Such are the words of our law. But listen to those of the Great Manitou. Last night the medicine-man of the Yaquis was ferried over the dark river and traveled through the country of souls. He saw there the warriors that had long since passed from earth, and the Great Spirit whispered his will in the ears of the medicine-man. Iron Hand must not take the girl to his wigwam until the rising of another moon."

"For three days! But," asked the chief suspiciously, "if once dead, how could you return to life?"

"The Manitou has power to give as well as take away life. Let the warrior come nearer and see if He is not even now talking through the lips of the dead."

Nerving himself, the chief crept forward slowly, and, with trembling fingers, drew back the covering, and gazed upon the wan features of the victim of starvation. The deep, solemn voice that thrilled through every fiber of his frame asked again:

"Is the face not that of the dead?"

"Yes,—yes," and the chief hastily retreated.

"And dare you doubt the words coming from the lips of the Manitou through the grave?"

"No,—go on!"

"The Great Spirit wills, also, that the young squaw should be left alone in the wigwam, and treated with every kindness."

"For three days! But what of the old prisoner?"

"When the pale squaw and the chieftain are married, then let the prisoner die. But not till then."

Half doubting the truth of what he had seen, only half believing what he had heard, and yet awed by the presence of death into submission, the chief was glad to gain the outer air.

But the work of the strange medicine-man was evidently not fully accomplished. He drew the dead man from the corner, covered the skeleton form with robes as nearly as possible like those he wore; painted the face and hands black; lifted it up and carried it above, placed
it with its back against the stone altar, so as to retain an upright position; threw more wood upon the fire, and again took the most direct route to the village.

The story of his death had arrived before him. Reticent as the chief had been trained to be from childhood, he could not keep the story of what he had seen to himself; and so, when told of the actions of the medicine-man previous to his return, he related his visit to the cave in full.

"It must have been his ghost," he said, with increasing awe.

Yet, to put the matter beyond the possibility of doubt, he sent back runners to the cave, and when they returned and reported that the medicine-man was seated upon the top of the rock, the chief was certain he had been conversing with a spirit.

Just at that moment, the painted, curiously-decorated form of the old priest stalked slowly past him.

If the dead could thus walk, what direful thing might not happen to any of their number? As it approached, they fled shrieking.

According to their superstitious belief, to have crossed the path of a ghost would have been followed by the most terrible calamities. Whichever way the ghost turned, men and women disappeared, and it could have depopulated the village had it been so disposed.

By midnight not a soul could be found stirring. Fearful retribution had been threatened silently by the ghost upon any that should do so.

The medicine-man had notified by signs that he would be responsible for the safety of the prisoners, and those who were bold enough to peep out saw him standing just within the shadow of the woods.

Much of this fear was owing to the darkness and the story of the chief, for when morning came again the Yaquis found strength and courage in numbers, and rushed to the wigwam where Nick Wharton had been confined, even though the medicine-man remained where they had last seen him.

It was empty!

They turned to that of the girl, and she also was gone!

With howls of rage and disappointed vengeance they rushed toward the medicine-man, to find his robes cunningly placed upon a bush that had been trimmed for that purpose—but no man inside them, while other dresses were scattered about.

With a glimmering sense of how their credulity and superstition had been practised upon, they dashed toward the cave and began clambering up the rocks.

Very few remained to tell of what they had seen, for, as the foremost reached the top, there was a mighty explosion, and the forms of the living were whirled aloft with the bones of the dead. A fearful hollow in the rocks was all that remained to tell of the once secret cave of the medicine-man.

CHAPTER X.

DOLORES' DEADLY PERIL.

Three fugitives from the power of the red men were toiling along by the side of a little stream that wound through a deep valley, and interchanging thoughts and relating all that had transpired since they had last been together.

"I tell you," said Nick Wharton, as he tenderly picked out the smoothest paths for the feet of Dolores to travel, "you may speak yer mind freely here, for the rustlin' of the trees will keep yer from bein' heard, even if there were plenty of outlyn' scouts to-night, which thar won't be."

"No," replied Jack Dixon, "you have taken good care that they should all remain in their wigwams."

"The cowardly fools," continued Nick Wharton, with a laugh. "To think how easy I managed them! The hardest part was handlin' the corpse. I knew it was nothin' but clay, but, after all, I had rather not done it, specially in the night time, and shouldn't hav done it, either, ef it hadn't bin for you two young folks."

"How very much we have to thank you for!" replied the girl, as she warmly pressed the hand she was holding. "When can we ever repay you?"

"Waal, you may some day. But if you don't, it ain't no great matter."

"I am sure I shall never forget your kindness. But do, my good friend, tell me the whole story. You know I am all in the dark, until the time you came into the wigwam where I was confined, and brought the disguise, and——"

"And came very near frightenin' you to death! But I had thought the boy had told you."

"Not a single word," said Jack Dixon.

"Waal, it were all on account of his craft and bravery that we ain't now lyin' in the wigwams of the Yaquis. But to begin at the beginnin', I was lyin', tied hand and foot in the wigwam, when who should enter but the medici-

me-man, and I thought my last hour had come, sure enough. But very soon I found it was the best friend I had in the whole world, and he told me all about the cave, and said as how he had come back to see if you were safe."

"Me?" asked the girl.

"Yes, nobody but you. I told him as how you hadn't bin brought back yet, but I didn't think you could possibly escape, and he said as how you must be saved, or we must both die for it."

The young trapper, who was walking upon the opposite side of the girl from Nick Wharton, felt a little warm hand creep within his arm, and he needed no greater reward for what he had done.

"Waal, we kinder put our heads together, and concluded to begin by makin' the redskins afraid, if we could, and so the boy jest burned a lot of brimstone he had
found in the cave, and I groaned and screamed as ef I were bein' run through with a hundred hot irons.

"Then I wanted him to go and take care of himself, but he said he wouldn't stir a step—that I knew more about playin' medicine-man than he did—and so he made me take his trappin's and stayed in my place."

"And what if he had been discovered and murdered?" gasped the girl, and Dixon felt the hand he held tremble violently.

"It would have gone hard with him, that's a fact," said Nick Wharton, "but I managed it so that there wasn't much danger of his bein' disturbed, leastwise for some time—told the braves by signs that I wanted to see the chief, and hurried back to the cave, which the boy had told me all about, to see what I could find and plan a way for the safety of all hands."

"And nobly you succeeded!"

"It were all along of that boy," replied Nick Wharton modestly, "though it did take some knowledge of the ways of the red critters, and a little long-headed calculation. But when I saw the dead man, it were all easy, and come to me in a mimit. I knew that if I could only impose on the chief, the rest wouldn't be hard."

"But I never came so near laughin' when I didn't want to! What a fool a man kin make of himself when he lets fear run away with judgment! At first I did think of tellin' the chief that it wouldn't do to marry you at all, but I kinder thought that wouldn't do, and so put it off for three days, knowin' that I would save you in that time, if it could be done."

"But you risked detection and your own life," said Dolores.

"That ain't nothin' to speak of. Yet I did come mighty near bein' found out when I got him to take a close look at the corpse, but he couldn't hav' jumped back quicker ef he had been bitten by a serpent. And you should have seen his face!"

"But I saw it wouldn't do to fool too long, and so I sent him off, and carried the body up to the top of the rock, and dressed it and built a fire, and got as many of the old dead medicine-man's traps as I could carry, and started for the wigwam where the boy was."

"I wasn't very long settin' him free, and I hadn't more'n got to the other side of the village before I saw he had slipped out, and was playin' his part like a man. And that completely upset the Injuns. Two ghost medicine-men at the same time war too much for them to stand. But after I had got you fixed up, and they saw three, I didn't know but that they would run away entirely. But there's one thing I'm very sorry about."

"And the frame of the old man shook with laughter."

"What was that?"

"Because I couldn't stay and see them when they found how they had bin taken in. It must have bin done before this time and—there goes the powder you put a slow match to in the cave, Dixon! If there were any Injuns pokin' around, they have found a quick way to the happy huntin'-grounds, and there'll be a good many wigwams empty."

"Are we in no danger of being followed?" asked the girl, with her anxiety returning.

"Certainly," replied Nick Wharton.

"And their vengeance would be terrible?"

"There's no doubt of that," said the old scout, "though I don't think they would harm you."

"But what should I do if you were to be taken and—merciful heavens—killed?"

And again the young trapper felt the soft fingers close tightly around his arm.

Breaking the silence for the first time, he whispered in a low and impressive voice:

"I will die for you, Dolores."

"And," said the old scout, "I'd die for you too, if it should come to that, but we'll—try cummin' and runnin' before fightin', thought if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't mind a scrap with the whole tribe, for I ain't no coward."

From that time every precaution that experience could dictate was taken to render their trail a blind one, and they hurried along with all possible speed until the sun had been up for hours and they had passed out of the valley and reached a high rocky point, whence they could see upon every side to a considerable distance.

Nick Wharton selected a spot that he deemed to be the most safe—one out from the timber, but protected by rocks and covered with tall, reedy grass that entirely hid them.

He had taken great care that there should be no signs of their having come in that direction, and gave it as his opinion that they might rest almost in safety for any length of time.

"We've got to stop some time," he said "and there ain't no place around half as good as this, for, though we can't conveniently get anything to eat, there is water handy, and a man can stand a pretty long tug on that, if it comes to the push. Anyhow, we can't go any farther until night comes, and it may be we'll have to take the back trail."

Nick Wharton soon withdrew to a little distance, flung himself at full length upon the hard ground, and very soon his eyes were closed, and he was to all appearance lost in slumber.

Yet such was not the case. He had a fashion of sleeping "with one eye open," of seeing, without seeming to do so, all that passed around. The lovers would not have been quite so free in their caresses had they known he had found out their secret, and was indulging in many a silent laugh at their expense.

But at length his heavy breathing told that he had, at last, wandered into the mysterious land of dreams.

As long as Jack Dixon and Dolores fancied that their old and true friend remained awake, they sat at a respect-
ful distance and talked only in the most commonplace manner of the events of the previous night—he filling in the details of which Nick Wharton had only sketched the outline.

But Dixon soon drew nearer to the girl and told her in low whispered words of passion of the desires of his soul—told the old, sweet story that has been repeated so many thousands of times.

"Dolores," he said, in a straightforward, manly way, and she made no resistance against the strong arm that crept around her waist. "Dolores, from the first moment I saw you, I loved you."

"And I, you, Jack," she replied, as honestly, though blushing at her boldness.

"And yet it might have taken a long time for me to have told you so, if you had remained safe at home. But somehow those scenes through which we have passed have made me bold."

"And what girl would not love a man who has passed through so much for her sake?" she asked earnestly.

"It is no more than Nick Wharton or I would have done for any one in your situation, and I didn't think of myself, but only of your sweet face."

"And I of you, Jack dear. When I expected every moment would be my last, I couldn't help thinking of and praying for you."

The honest confession was repaid in true lover's fashion, and for a long time their conversation ran in the same channel—broken only when the young trapper cautiously raised his head above the tall grass and sent his eagle eye glancing over every part of the surrounding country.

But as their reserve was broken down, and they talked more freely and told of all their hopes and fears, something of caution was forgotten, and for many minutes an enemy might have remained in plain sight and undiscovered.

But Jack fancied, soon after the dawn, that he saw something that might betoken danger. What it was he could not then determine. Far away upon the prairie were black spots that he had not noticed before. They might be birds, or beasts, or simply stones. Until something more tangible was to be seen, he would not disturb either the girl or his male companion.

Yet he could not blind the eyes of a newly-awakened love.

Even as he resumed his seat, Dolores saw at a glance that something was wrong and she exclaimed in alarm:

"Jack, what have you seen? Are the Indians coming?"

"No, Dolores, at least I don't think they are," he replied, soothingly.

"But you have seen something, your face tells me that."

"I don't know that I have discovered anything that wasn't there before," said Jack.

"Had we not better call Nick Wharton?" asked the girl.

"Not yet."

"At least let me look."

He took hold of her hand and guided her to where she could obtain a clear view, and they sat silently watching for some time.

Then the same opinion found expression at the same instant from their lips:

"Horses!"

Soon the horses drew so near that Jack could decide that the riders were Indians. A moment after, they separated and some rode swiftly around to the other side of the hill.

"Do not stir for your life," he whispered to the girl, "or make the slightest noise. I will creep around and watch them. If there is any danger of their coming here, I will let you know and wake up Nick Wharton."

With scarcely the moving of a reed he crept away, and she bowed her head and lay as low to the ground as possible—almost held her breath. But she had not been long in that position before a sharp hissing sound attracted her attention, and turning quickly she saw a large rattlesnake.

The serpent had come out from one of the many holes around, and had approached very near, apparently without being aware of her presence. But the instant it saw her it threw itself into a massive coil, with upraised head, fire-flashing eyes, spitefully-darting tongue and rapidly-vibrating tail.

What should she do?

A number of the Indians had drawn up their horses and were eagerly looking up at the high land upon which she lay concealed. Nick Wharton was sleeping at a distance, and her lover had gone she knew not whither.

If she raised herself up or called for help, it would give the Indians notice of her presence, and if she remained it would be to meet death in the most horrid form.

Even when she had been a prisoner in the Yaqui village, her nerves had not been so terribly tried. But there was no time for thought. Brave as she had shown herself, she felt the cold sweat standing upon her forehead and oozing out through every pore of her skin.

The aspect of the snake was constantly becoming more threatening. Its hideous eyes flashed and burned like living coals—its neck became more rigid—the scales shone more and more like burnished gold and jet—its head was thrust forward—its mouth more open, and its rattles rang more sharply!

The poor girl dared not raise up or attempt to flee—dared not crawl away—dared not even turn over. The Indians who were watching from below would at once detect the sudden disturbance of the grass, and rush to learn the cause.
She drew back as far as possible, and called, in the lowest voice, to Nick Wharton—to her lover. But there was no answer save the angry hiss of the serpent as it uncoiled with lightning rapidity, drew nearer, and again prepared itself for battle—with every fold in its body convulsed with fury.

She could have put out her hand and touched it, but she was almost paralyzed with fear, and fascinated by the changing light that flashed from scales and eyes.

What should she do? The answer was forced upon her.

With the swiftness of thought the head of the serpent was flung forward—it fastened itself upon her arm.

Human nature burst through all restraints, and Dolores' screams could have been heard for hundreds of yards.

CHAPTER XI.
BEATING THE YAQUIS.

The effect of the girl's screaming was electrical.

From a thick belt of brushwood and timber near by, Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill came rushing up, just as Nick Wharton leaped to his feet. They were followed by a band of Mexican peons—the men employed on Don Ramon's ranch.

By a wonderful coincidence, the king of the scouts and his followers arrived on the scene at the precise moment when they were most needed.

From the brow of a hill, some distance off, Cody had seen the girl and her two companions through his field-glasses. He had also seen the Indians near-by, and, recognizing the danger to which his friends were exposed, had hastened to their assistance, moving his little force carefully under cover, so that they would not be seen by the Indians.

Buffalo Bill instantly whipped out his long Bowie-knife from his belt, and, with one quick slash, severed the snake in halves.

"It bit me! I'm poisoned!" moaned the girl, her face pale as death, as she sank to the ground.

"Hold the Indians off," said Buffalo Bill to his comrades. "I will attend to her."

By this time Jack had come running back, and the Yaquis, having discovered the party, were hastening to the attack.

Jack clasped his sweetheart in his arms, but Buffalo Bill sternly ordered him to let her go and do his part in the fighting. The young man was so agitated that he was worse than useless for the task of reviving Dolores and saving the life which was so seriously threatened.

Fortunately, Buffalo Bill had had experience in cases of snake-bite before, and knew exactly what to do. First, he took out his flask of brandy and forced the whole of the contents down the girl's throat. The fiery fluid, all the more potent because she had never tasted a drop of it before in her life, instantly revived the girl from the stupor into which she had fallen.

The fight with the Yaquis had already commenced, the whites having gone forward and taken cover behind rocks and trees, from which they were firing merrily on their enemies, who were replying with arrows and bullets. Buffalo Bill called two of the peons to him.

"Keep Donna Dolores awake, at any cost," he commanded. "Do not let her sink back into sleep. Shake her—slap her face—do anything; but do not let her sleep."

The peons carried out this command faithfully, and meanwhile Buffalo Bill took from his pocket a piece of snakestone and applied it to the minute puncture made by the serpent's fangs. It had been given to him long ago by an old medicine-man of the Navajos, and he had often proved its virtue.

It drew the poison out of the wound as a magnet draws steel to it, and in a few minutes Cody knew that the girl was out of danger.

A healthy color returned to her cheeks, which had commenced to turn absolutely blue before the snakestone was applied. Her breathing became regular, and soon there was no difficulty in keeping her awake.

"How do you feel?" Cody asked anxiously, when she opened her eyes.

"Quite well," Dolores replied. "I feel no pain. You have saved me. Ah, how terrible it was when that snake drew nearer and nearer to me!"

"You are safe now," said Buffalo Bill reassuringly. "But I cannot stay here. It looks as if the Yaquis are about to charge. I must go to help my friends. The peons will stay here to guard you."

The border king's apprehension was a true one. Just as he reached the firing-line, and sank down behind a rock by the side of Wild Bill, the Indians rushed from their cover and came charging toward his party.

They outnumbered them by more than three to one, but in their reckless daring they did not take account of the havoc that can be wrought by repeating-rifles at close range.

More than half of the Yaquis fell before they had crossed a third of the distance that separated them from their foes.

"Give it to them again!" cried Buffalo Bill, as the savages stopped in momentary panic, uncertain whether to go forward or turn tail.

A second volley, which stretched a dozen more of their number on the ground, decided them, and they fled in wild dismay back to their cover.

"After them, boys!" yelled Buffalo Bill, suitting the action to the word.

The Yaquis did not stop to face the return charge. Most of them were shot down. The rest fled on wildly
to their horses, mounted, and fled at the top of their speed.

"It will not do for us to stay here," said Buffalo Bill, as soon as the Americans and Mexicans had finished congratulating one another on their victory. "We must take the trail for Don Ramon's ranch at once. Those few Yaquis who escaped will bring a bunch of their comrades after us as soon as they can, we may be sure of that."

The truth of this was apparent, and a start was promptly made. Fortunately, the peons had several spare mounts with them, so that it was possible to travel swiftly.

As they rode on, Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill swapped stories of their adventures with Nick Wharton and Jack Dixon. The two former had not much to tell.

They had followed the trail of the other party of Yaquis, and had been led a very roundabout way. The Yaquis had gone off their course several times to hunt—which convinced the two scouts that they were not on the track of the band that had the girl with it. However, they had followed the trail faithfully, and picked up the party of peons on the way—still looking for their lost quarry. By a lucky chance, they fell in with the three fugitives just when they were most needed.

Don Ramon's ranch was reached without any further misadventures. If the Yaquis pursued, they were too slow about it, for the little party saw nothing of them.

The delight of the rancher at getting his beloved daughter back again, safe and sound, knew no bounds. He was deeply grateful to all the four Americans, but most of all to Jack Dixon and Nick Wharton.

He even went so far as to offer Nick a partnership in his magnificent ranch, but the sturdy old scout refused the offer, saying that what he had done he had not done for gain.

"As for you, Jack," said Don Ramon, "I know very well the only reward that you want. Dolores tells me that she loves you. Take her, my boy, and settle down on the ranch here, and be happy. Don't worry any more about that hidden hoard of the Aztecs. Don't risk your life going back to the Yaqui country."

Jack shook his head.

"There's nothing I would like better, Don Ramon," he replied, "but my honor is engaged in this matter. I don't care so much about the money, though I confess I wouldn't like to come to Dolores as a poor man and live upon her wealth. But I've brought my friends down from the United States to find this treasure, and I can't leave them in the lurch now."

"That is true," agreed Don Ramon.

"I don't quite see it," said Cody. "We could search for the treasure by ourselves, and not expose Jack to the risks of the adventure. We know from the translation of the old Aztec's directions where the cave in which the hoard is kept is located."

"Do you think I would let you brave the dangers alone?" cried Jack hotly. "What do you take me for? Say no more—I am going with you. There is no reason to be frightened of the Yaquis. We have beaten them before by cunning and we have beaten them in fight. We will do it again, if necessary."

Jack's resolution could not be shaken, even by the thought that Dolores would long for him in his absence. For the matter of that, the high-spirited girl would have thought a great deal less of him if he had not decided as he did.

Following the advice of Don Ramon, the four Americans stayed on the ranch for six weeks, to give time for the excitement they had caused among the Yaquis to die down. They had a very pleasant time, and, needless to say, Jack and Dolores were as happy as the days were long.

But this all-to-brief holiday soon came to an end, and Jack and the three scouts set out, by a long and circuitous route, on their daring expedition back to the Yaqui country.

They took with them half-a-dozen pack-mules, as well as spare horses, for the purpose of transporting the treasure, if they should be so lucky as to get away with it.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE CAVE OF THE SKULLS.

"I will go in alone," said Buffalo Bill. "You fellows had better stay here at the entrance and keep a bright lookout. Let me know if you see any Indians. It would not do for them to come into the cave and surprise us, as they might very well do if we all entered."

"I can spy out the ground and find if the treasure is still there, and report to you. If it is, three of us can go back in there and get it, while the fourth man keeps a good lookout here."

As the king of the scouts said these words, he was standing with his friends outside the mouth of the cave in which, if the dead Atahalpa was to be believed, the lost treasure of the Aztecs was hidden.

His comrades raised some objection to this proposal, but in the end Buffalo Bill had his way, as he usually did.

They concealed the pack-mules and the horses in a thick belt of timber near by, and Nick Wharton remained with them; while Wild Bill and Jack Dixon hid themselves in some bushes near the mouth of the cave.

Up to the present, nothing had been seen of the Yaquis, but there was no telling how soon they might reveal themselves at a highly inconvenient moment. The cave was far too near to the Yaqui village in which Nick and Jack had met with their stirring adventures for them to have any illusions about their safety.
All of the four knew very well that they were in the deadliest peril all the time they stayed in the Yaqui country, and still more while they hovered around the sacred cave in which the treasure was concealed.

The mouth of the cave looked very dark and forbidding as Buffalo Bill entered it, but it needed more than that to try the nerves or weaken the courage of the heroic border king.

Lighting a torch, he pushed boldly on his way, going first through a narrow natural tunnel in the limestone rock, in which he could barely stand upright.

This passage soon widened out and grew higher, until at last he stepped out into a spacious cavern, with a high vaulted dome, from which thousands of crystal stalactites hung.

This vast natural hall was dimly lighted through a small hole in the roof, which showed that the rock above was very thin. The hole was covered over with creeping vines and other vegetation of the rank tropical wood, which made the light that filtered through of a greenish color, producing a ghastly effect.

As he walked over the rocky floor of this cavern, Buffalo Bill’s foot struck against something hard and white. He bent down and picked it up.

It was a human skull!

Shuddering, in spite of all his cool nerve, the border king flung the grim token of mortality far from him.

He elevated his torch above his head and looked around.

He saw, to his horror, that the cavern was a veritable Golgotha—a place of skulls!

There were hundreds of them within the range of his vision, and doubtless there were thousands in that terrible hall altogether, for the floor was literally covered with them. Human skeletons and bones of all kinds and descriptions were also scattered around on every side.

A man of less courage and coolness would have fled back to his friends in the outer air, with pallid face and shaking limbs; but Cody was of tougher fiber than that.

All that he had heard of the human sacrifices in which the Yaquis were reputed to delight now returned to his mind, and he knew that the stories which had been told to him had been less than the truth.

Here was the place in which generations of victims had found their long home, and in which it was quite possible he also would find his. But the gallant scout had set his hand to the plow, and he scorned to turn back.

As swiftly as he could, he passed through the hall of the skulls and through a narrow passage into another cavern, which was of still vaster dimensions. He went into this one very cautiously, casting the light ahead of his path.

It was well that he did so, for he was brought up suddenly on the brink of a yawning chasm—black and bottomless as the mouth of the pit.

Lying down on the brink, he looked over and held the torch downward; but he could not see the bottom—notting but pitchy blackness. He took up a big stone and threw it down. Before it touched the bottom, with a sullen “boom,” he was able to count fifty.

Rising to his feet, he looked around for a means of passing by the chasm. He saw that, on the right, it ran up to the solid wall of the cave; but on the left there was a narrow, rocky path which he could tread in safety, if he walked carefully.

This, again, was a task from which most men would have shrunk; but Buffalo Bill did not hesitate for a moment. Holding the torch well in front of him, to throw light on any obstacles in the path, he stepped boldly forward, and had soon passed the chasm and was standing on the solid floor on the farther side of the cave.

Since he had left the hall of the skulls he had noticed one fact which caused him considerable uneasiness.

The air was continually growing fresher and purer as he advanced.

This could only mean that there was some other entrance, or perhaps several entrances, besides the one which his friends were guarding. And it was obvious that some of the Yaquis might enter by these ways and take him by surprise.

He took good care that his revolver was loose in his holster and ready to his hand. It was the only weapon he had with him, with the exception of his bowie-knife. Then he pushed on as bravely as before.

But he had not gone many paces before he met with the supreme test to which his iron nerve was to be subjected.

The cavern narrowed again, and at a point where it was not more than ten yards wide he came face to face with a human skeleton, standing upright and pointing at him with menacing bony fingers.

For a moment Buffalo Bill’s blood ran cold. Then he pulled himself together, and laughed—but not very cheerfully.

“Do the Yaqui priests think they will frighten grown men with such childish phantoms?” he muttered to himself. “I’ve seen death too often to be scared by its remains. It is behind this bogey that the treasure is hidden, I’ll wager.”

He walked firmly past the skeleton, and entered a third rocky chamber, very much smaller than either of the others.

As he cast the light of the torch around him, a wonderful sight met his eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE BRINK OF THE CHASM.

Gold—gold—gold! Gold on every hand!

It was ranged against the walls in great heaps, and the floor was covered with it, so that there was hardly a
place where he could tread without stepping on the precious metal.

Buffalo Bill saw, at a glance, that Atuahalpa, the last of the Aztecs, had not exaggerated when he spoke of the value of the secret hoard that was all that was left of Montezuma's ill-starred empire.

The wealth spread around him could not possibly be computed, but it must have represented many scores of millions of dollars. The gold was mostly in the form of curiously carved vessels and ornaments that had been used in the service of the ancient temples of the sun, but there were also stacks on stacks of golden ingots.

Cody took one ingot up and weighed it in his hand. He found that it weighed at least a pound.

"Well, it won't be an easy task to get this stuff out of the cave into the daylight," he muttered to himself.

"How on earth can we get past the narrow path around that chasm? It is perilous enough for a man to cross that path without any burden. We would have to swing a guard-ropes along the outer edge before we would dare to carry the gold across.

"And even if we could get the stuff safely to America, what in thunder could we do with it all? What could any man do with such vast wealth? I should be sorry for poor Dixon, trying to spend it for the benefit of humanity. In the end he would probably do humanity more harm than good."

While he made these philosophic reflections, the border king was looking carefully around the treasure-vault. In the farther corner he found several chests made of solid gold.

Their lids swung open easily, and inside he saw bag after bag made of toughened deerskin. The fiber had withstood the withering hand of the centuries, for it had been treated with some chemical preparation of which the ancient Aztecs had possessed the secret.

Opening the bags, Buffalo Bill saw that they were filled with rubies and emeralds and other precious stones, just as Atuahalpa had stated. Most of the stones were uncut, but a few had been subjected to the art of the Aztec lapidaries, and their numerous facets shone out brilliantly in the dimness of the cavern, as they caught the light of the torch.

"Here is wealth that can be carried," said Buffalo Bill to himself. "This is better than golden ingots."

He took up two of the bags, one containing rubies and the other emeralds, and swung them around his neck by a couple of the rawhide thongs which, like all good hunters, he always carried with him.

Then he turned to leave the cavern and rejoin his friends.

"I'll see what the others think about it," he said to himself; "but, as far as I am concerned, I'd be quite content to let the rest of the treasure stay here. Even a fiftieth part of the value of these rubies and emeralds ought to be enough to satisfy the four of us."

The king of the scouts returned past the standing skeleton into the second cavern, and at last stood on the brink of the narrow path that bordered on the chasm.

He liked the look of it even less than when he had first crossed it, but there was no alternative, so he nerved himself for the passage.

When he was half-way across, a tall Indian rose suddenly from behind a rock only about a couple of yards in front of him.

Buffalo Bill's hand went instantly to the holster in which he carried his revolver, but before he could draw it the Yaqui grappled with him. Then began a fearful struggle for life on the brink of that deadly chasm.

The Indian, who was plainly a medicine-man by the ghastly ornaments that he wore, held a drawn knife in his right hand, but before he could strike downward with it Buffalo Bill seized his wrist and twisted it so violently that he was forced to drop the weapon, uttering a. the same time a yell of pain.

The medicine-man, however, managed to hang tightly to Cody's right arm and prevent him from drawing his revolver. Backward and forward they swung on the narrow path, often within a few inches of the precipice.

The Yaqui seemed to be absolutely reckless of his own life. All he was seeking for was to destroy the white man who had dared to enter the sacred cave of his people and profane it.

The border king was, therefore, at a great disadvantage; for he, of course, was striving to get rid of his adversary without falling into the abyss himself.

But for his wonderful strength and his skill in wrestling, he would have stood no chance of life. Even as it was, he was very hard put to it to hold his own against his fanatical enemy.

At last he managed to get one hand—his left—free for a moment. Instantly he whirled his knife out of his belt and stabbed the medicine-man in the throat with it.

The blow was a fatal one, but even in the last agony of death the fanatic tried to drag his foe down to death with him. But his failing strength was not equal to the task, and, with a gurgling cry, he relaxed his grasp and fell backward into the chasm.

Buffalo Bill staggered against the wall of the cavern, breathless and exhausted by his terrible struggle. It was several minutes before he recovered himself sufficiently to go on his way through the cave of the skulls and rejoin his friends.

"Why, what's the matter, Cody?" asked Jack, staring at him in surprise, as he stumbled, blinking and pallid,
into the fresh air and the daylight. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I haven't seen any ghost, but I have seen enough skulls and skeletons to furnish half-a-dozen graveyards, and I had a struggle for life which was one of the nearest things I ever knew."

"Did you see anything of the treasure?"

For answer Cody exhibited his two bags of rubies and emeralds, and gave a brief account of his adventures in the cave.

While he was doing so, Nick Wharton came hastening up from the timber where he had been taking charge of the mules and horses. He reported that he had sighted a party of over fifty Yaquis, who seemed to be riding in the direction of the cave.

"We must cut an' run fur it, or we must hide," said the old scout. "There are too many of them fur us ter fight."

"Which shall it be, boys—ride or hide?" asked the king of the scouts. "If we ride, it means, of course, that we give up the attempt to get the rest of the treasure. I don't see what we want with more than we've got, and I'm quite free to confess that personally I don't want to go back into that terrible cave again."

"I vote for giving up the attempt," said Jack. "We have got all we need. There is a curse on the place, and we should be fools to risk our lives in there, after the experience Buffalo Bill has had."

Wild Bill and Nick Wharton agreed heartily.

Leaving their pack-mules to go free, now that they would no longer be wanted, the four friends mounted their horses and rode boldly out of their concealment on to the open plain at the base of the mountain in which the cave was located.

They speedily came into sight of the Yaquis whom Nick Wharton had seen. The savages were now about a mile off.

When they saw the hated palefaces, they gave an ear-splitting yell, and, urging their horses to their fullest speed, chased them hotly.

But it was a vain effort, for Buffalo Bill and his comrades had the advantage in every way.

They were better mounted than the Yaquis and they had spare horses with them. Then, too, their repeating-rifles would carry farther than the few trade-guns which the savages carried—wretched weapons obtained illicitly through disloyal Mexican traders who did not mind selling guns to their country's foes, if thereby they could make a paltry profit.

At a word from Buffalo Bill, the scouts reined in their horses and permitted the Yaquis to come within easy range of their rifles.

Thinking that they had their enemies in the hollow of their hands, the savages urged their steeds to renewed efforts.

Their mistake was speedily discovered. Five rifles suddenly blazed out, and five Yaquis dropped from their saddles.

They returned the fire, but their trade-guns would not carry the range.

The Americans turned their horses' heads and galloped away, after teaching their enemies this lesson.

The Yaquis soon perceived the uselessness of the chase and tired of it. One by one they tailed off, until at last not a single brave was left in sight.

Don Ramon's ranch was safely reached, and the welcome that was given to the bold adventurers may better be imagined than described.

The old rancher, who seemed to know pretty nearly everything, estimated that the rubies and emeralds, which numbered over five hundred stones, large and small, would fetch at least eight millions of dollars, if sold carefully and quietly, so as not to flood the market.

Keeping to the agreement to retain only a fiftieth for themselves, this would give each of the four men the nice little sum of forty thousand dollars.

They were all thoroughly satisfied with this. Indeed, old Nick Wharton declared that he would not know what to do with so much money.

"I know quite well what you'll do with it, Nick," said Cody, laughing gaily.

"What's that?"

"You'll give it away in a few months to those who need it more than you do. That's what you have always done whenever you had any money, and I reckon it's what you always will do."

"You needn't talk, Bill Cody," growled the old scout. "I've seen you fling money away as if it was dirt, too."

"I know what I shall do with my share," put in Jack. "I shall ask you to sell me a share in your ranch, Don Ramon, and then I shall marry Dolores and settle down."

CHAPTER XIV.

LOPEZ SEeks THE TREASURE.

That night, Buffalo Bill and his comrades slept at the hacienda.

That, perhaps, is hardly a correct way to put it. They all went to bed, but the king of the scouts found that sleep would not come to him. He felt, by some mysterious intuition, that there was danger in the air.

After tossing to and fro on his bed for an hour, he rose, dressed himself, and went into the next bedroom, to which Wild Bill and Nick Wharton had been assigned. He was hardly surprised to find that they, too, were restless. They acknowledged that they felt much the same way that he did.

"With all these pretty sparklers in the house, there's a mighty strong temptation to some one to try to loot them," said Wild Bill.
"Yes, and you know who is likely to make the attempt," remarked Cody significantly.

"Our old friend, Lopez, with that gang of his?"

"Precisely."

"It’s rather strange that we’ve seen nothing of him since that night he fired at you at the posada," mused Hickok.

"It only shows, to my mind, that we are all the more likely to see him now," said Buffalo Bill. "If he knows that we have got back from the Yaqui country he will guess that we have brought some of the treasure with us, and you may be sure he will make an effort to get it for himself and his gang."

Wild Bill and Nick Wharton both got out of their beds, and slipped on their clothes.

"We’ll take a walk around the place and see whether we can spot anything suspicious," said Hickok. "A house like this, exposed to the constant risk of attacks by Indians and outlaws, ought to be always guarded at night."

The three scouts had not far to seek before they found plenty to justify their suspicions.

They descended to the ground floor, and Cody was about to open the front door, when Nick Wharton, who had been looking out from a window, called to him in a low voice not to do so.

Cody looked at him inquiringly, and Nick beckoned him to the window.

Outside, in the level space under the trees that surrounded the house, was a band of over thirty men. They were dismounting from their horses and advancing to the door. Their faces were all masked, and the foremost of them carried a large ax in his hand.

"Hold your fire till they get the door down," whispered Cody. "Then we shall have them on the hip."

Each of the three scouts, with a revolver in either hand, silently awaited the struggle.

The man with the ax swung it above his head, and dashed it with all his strength against the door. He broke it down with half-a-dozen blows, but just as he was about to rush over the threshold the first bullet, fired by Cody, stretched him dead.

His comrades, firing wildly, tried to charge in, but the three scouts fired so swiftly and so straight that they had no chance.

Half-a-dozen of them fell almost in as many seconds, and the rest, alarmed by the unexpected resistance with which they had been met, were stricken with panic, and fled to their horses.

Several were shot down before they could mount, and the survivors were hotly chased by Don Ramon’s peons, who had run hastily out of the outbuildings in which they lived on hearing the sound of the firing.

Nearly all of the outlaws were caught and made prisoners, and in due course of time were sentenced by the Mexican courts to pay the full penalty of their many crimes.

When Cody removed the mask of the first man he had shot—the man with the ax—the sinister features of Dr. Lopez were revealed.

No further attempts were made to rob the scouts of their hard-won treasure, and in time the emeralds and rubies were sold for the full price which Don Ramon had estimated they would fetch.

Buffalo Bill and his two comrades spent a pretty large part of their dollars in buying the handsomest wedding present they could think of for Jack Dixon and Dores.

As for the bulk of the lost treasure of the Aztecs, it still remains hidden in the sacred cave of the Yaquis, and it is likely to stay there for all time, since Jack Dixon burned the parchments given to him by Atahalpa, the last of the caciques.

THE END.

The story in this series next week, No. 245, will be "Buffalo Bill’s Lost Quarry; or, Following a Cold Trail." It will tell of one of the most marvelous feats of tracking ever performed by the border king. Several new and most interesting characters will be introduced, and the story will be full of thrilling incidents and adventures.
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