

THE REAL CHRISTMAS?

HISTORY OF THE YULE TIDE, PAST AND PRESENT.

Amusing German Idea—A Real Santa Claus—Proverbs—Celebrated in April or May—Sacred Oak and Christmas Tree—Thoughts From Great Thinkers.

It is not known when Christmas was first celebrated as a festival, or as a holy day. The earliest mention that can be found is that in A. D. 138, Pope Telesphorus, ordered its observance. What day of the year was then observed as the anniversary of the birth of Christ is not definitely certain. It was confounded with the Epiphany and was often celebrated in the east in the months of April or May instead of as now in December.

The twenty-fifth day of December has, however, been the day set apart since the fourth century of the Christian era. Sometime in that century, St. Cyril, of Jerusalem, feeling that there should be no longer any doubt about the correct anniversary asked Pope Julius I, to order that an investigation be had. It was so decided and savants gathered at Rome from the east and west and after considerable study of the archives at that place, concluded that though not definitely certain the 25th day of December was the nearest correct of all the dates placed before them. Since that time this day has been duly solemnized all over the civilized world.

It is common tradition that Christ was born about midnight.

The celebration in the earliest times began with singing canticles, called carols. These were supposed to represent the songs sung by the shepherds. Alter a time these songs became enlivened by dances and music. Fathers, mothers and children mingled in the dance, and if at night each bore in hand a lighted taper.

The general celebration of Christmas as we now have it, as a day of feasting and good-fellowship,—more as a holiday than a church holy day, took its origin in Germany. It was then called the children's festival. The custom was to choose some man in the village, who was known for the time as Kuecht Rupert. To him were all the presents given and on Christmas day, grotesquely apparelled, he drove from house to house, receiving a very cordial welcome, when he distributed the gifts that had been sent him.

The German custom was similar to the English where the celebration became of great importance and Yule was the great feast day. Then the nobles and retainers met on almost common footing, and great kegs of ale were quaffed beneath the mistletoe, and the best deer in the forest and finest fish in the streams graced the board. Hunters, hawks and hounds came into the great dining hall, and deep drinking and rousing cheer and mirth marked the passing of the day. Not only was the 25th of December duly celebrated in England but the festival often continued from Christmas eve till February, second, twelfth night. In the houses of the nobility a lord of misrule or "abbot of unreason" was appointed, whose duty it was to make the rarest pastimes and devise or invent amusement for the festival. He had full control of the household for the time being. Holly and Ivy are the evergreens used in England though the two great colleges have always decorated their chapels with laurel.

A superstition that prevailed in England and which is yet commonly believed is that the oxen go down on their knees at midnight on Christmas eve as an act of reverence, and that since the change of time from old to new style they have invariably followed the custom on the eve of old Christmas day. It is believed that this tradition took its rise from an old print, issued in the 16th century, wherein a representation of the birth of Christ, shows an ox and an ass on their knees as though worshipping the newly born Saviour. A Latin poem of Sannazaro alludes to the animals thus showing obedience to the ruler of the universe.

Coming down to later days Santa Claus (St. Nicholas) was first introduced to America by the Dutch settlers of New York. He is the representative of the German Kuecht Rupert.

Supplying him with a team, which is always depicted as composed of four reindeer, took its origin in Norway where the feast of Christmas is celebrated with a great display of good will to men.

The following stanza taken from an old poem, gives a brief but vivid description of the Christmas festival in a feudal castle:

On Christmas eve the bells were rung;
On Christmas eve the mass was sung;
That only night in all the year,
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear.
Then opened wide the baron's hall
To vassal, tenant, serf and all;
Power laid his rod of rule aside,
And ceremony doffed his pride.
The heir, with roses in his shoes,
That night might village partner choose.
All hailed, with uncontrolled delight
And general voice, the happy night
That to the cottage, as the crown,
Brought tidings of salvation down.
England was merry England when
Old Christmas brought his sports a-ale,
'Twas Christmas brouched the brightest ale,
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol of would cheer
A poor man's heart through half the year.

All holidays have certain proverbs or sayings connected with them and Christmas is no exception. Among them are the following:

If we will bear a man before Christmas, it will not bear a man afterward.

If Christmas finds a bridge, he'll break it; if he finds none he'll make one.

The shepherd would rather see his wife enter the stable on Christmas day than the sun.

If the sun shines through the apple tree on Christmas day, there will be an abundant crop the following year.

The following bits of good advice are especially designed for the great world wide festival:

At Christmas be merry and thankful, withal and feast thy poor neighbors, the great with the small.—Thomas Tusser.

Christmas is the only holiday of the year that brings the whole human family into common communion.—Dickens.

'Tis the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame of charity in the heart.—Washington Irving.

Christmas is the time in which the memory of every remedial sorrow, wrong and trouble in the world around us should be active with us.—Dickens.

There's a song in the air, there's a star in the sky;

There's a mother's deep prayer, and a baby's low cry;

And the star rains its fire, while the beautiful stars;

And the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King.

There is a beautiful legend connected with the introduction of Christianity into Germany, wherein the Christmas tree bears an important part.

The natives of Tauringia and Hesse had had misfortunes during the year and had called a large gathering on December, the 25th, to offer sacrifices to Thor, the thunder god. The sacrifice was to be a boy, Azalf, the son of Duke Alvoild.

The boy was placed on his knees, blindfolded before the heathen priest, at the sacred oak. The huge stone axe was lifted to dash out his brains; his mother Thelkla was standing near in agony of spirit. At this instant, Winifred, a Christian priest of England rushed in and turned the axe aside, then grasping it he gashed the oak so that the fierce wind which was blowing dashed it down. Winifred then mounted the prostrate tree and said:—"Hearken, ye sons of the forest! No blood shall flow this night save that which pity has drawn from the mother's breast. For this is the birth-night of the white-Christ, the son of the All-Father, the Saviour of mankind. Fairer is he than Odin the Wise, kinder than Freya the Good. Since he has come sacrifice is ended."

Winifred let the axe drop and said pointing to a small fir tree.

This little tree, a young child of the forest, shall be your holy tree to-night. It is the wood of peace, for your houses are built of fir. It is the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are evergreen. See how it points upward to heaven. Let this be called the tree of the Christ-child, gather about it, not in the wild wood but in your own houses; there it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and rites of kindness. And they took the fir-tree from its place and carried it in joyful procession to the edge of the glebe and put it on one of the sledges. When they came to the village Alvoild bade them open the doors of his great hall and set the tree in the midst of it. They kindled light among its branches till it seemed to be tangled full of stars. The children encircled it wondering, as the sweet smell of the balsam filled the house. Then Winifred stood up on the dais at the end of the hall with the old priest sitting at his feet near by, and told the story of Bethlehem, of the babe in the manger, of the shepherds on the hillsides, of the hosts of angels and the strange music."

Thus was Christmas and the Christmas tree introduced into Germany.

CHRISTMAS CARD POETRY.

Sometimes the Card and Poetry are Planned Two Years Before.

Few people imagine the amount of trouble that is taken over even the cheapest of Christmas cards. Yet, after all, it is not so easy to do as it looks. Could I but subjoin a specimen of my manuscript, when I have had a particularly tough subject to deal with, readers would be surprised to note that even writing poetry to order requires an amount of labor that would hardly be believed.

The mode of procedure is somewhat as follows: A rough sketch of the original design is forwarded to me, with an intimation of how many lines are required, whether they are to go on the front or the back of the card, and oftentimes in what shape the lines are to appear when printed.

Sometimes trick cards require a special arrangement of lines, perhaps a couplet on the front and eight or ten lines on the back, or perhaps three lines in one corner and three in another, and so on.

Designs upon every conceivable subject have I received to finish off with a suitable verse or set of verses. Humorous, religious, special, and what are termed neutral designs abound. These latter almost cause a poor poet to tear his hair. There may be absolutely nothing in the design but a landscape, or a seascape, or something equally indefinite, and the muse refuses to work. The only way out of the difficulty is to put the design out of sight for an hour or two. In the meantime I turn to another, which perhaps may be so full of matter that the lines flow from my pen without any apparent trouble; then, having got, as it were, into the swing of the thing, I can return to the troublesome one and work it out successfully.

Christmas cards are seldom produced in a hurry. They are designed and worked out sometimes two years before they are on sale in the retail shops. I have written poetry in the summer that would not be in the shop windows until the following Christmas twelve months; and when one realizes the fact that travellers place their Christmas card novelties upon the market in June, one can easily understand that much time must be given to the preparation of such simple things.

TO SPEND LEISURE TIME.

THE HOME OF THE UNION CLUB MEN OF ST. JOHN.

Some Description of a Building that is a Credit to the City and a Club that its Members May Well be Proud of—A Holiday Residence.

The population of St. John is one of active workers. There are very few men of leisure. All of its better class are business or professional men engaged in the active duties of their occupation. There is no need here for idlers; such will find it difficult to procure companions to aid them in their efforts to kill time. The citizens of St. John are not men of leisure hours but men of leisure moments.

Before the inauguration of the Union Club, St. John lacked something which is highly necessary to the business man, a resort for his moments of leisure. And herein is the chief characteristic of this club in that it is a business man's club, one for men who have, not days to spend in repose, but only moments of idleness between the calls of duty.

Central in its location and in close proximity to the marts of commerce, neat and substantial in structure and handsome in its appointments, the club has all that

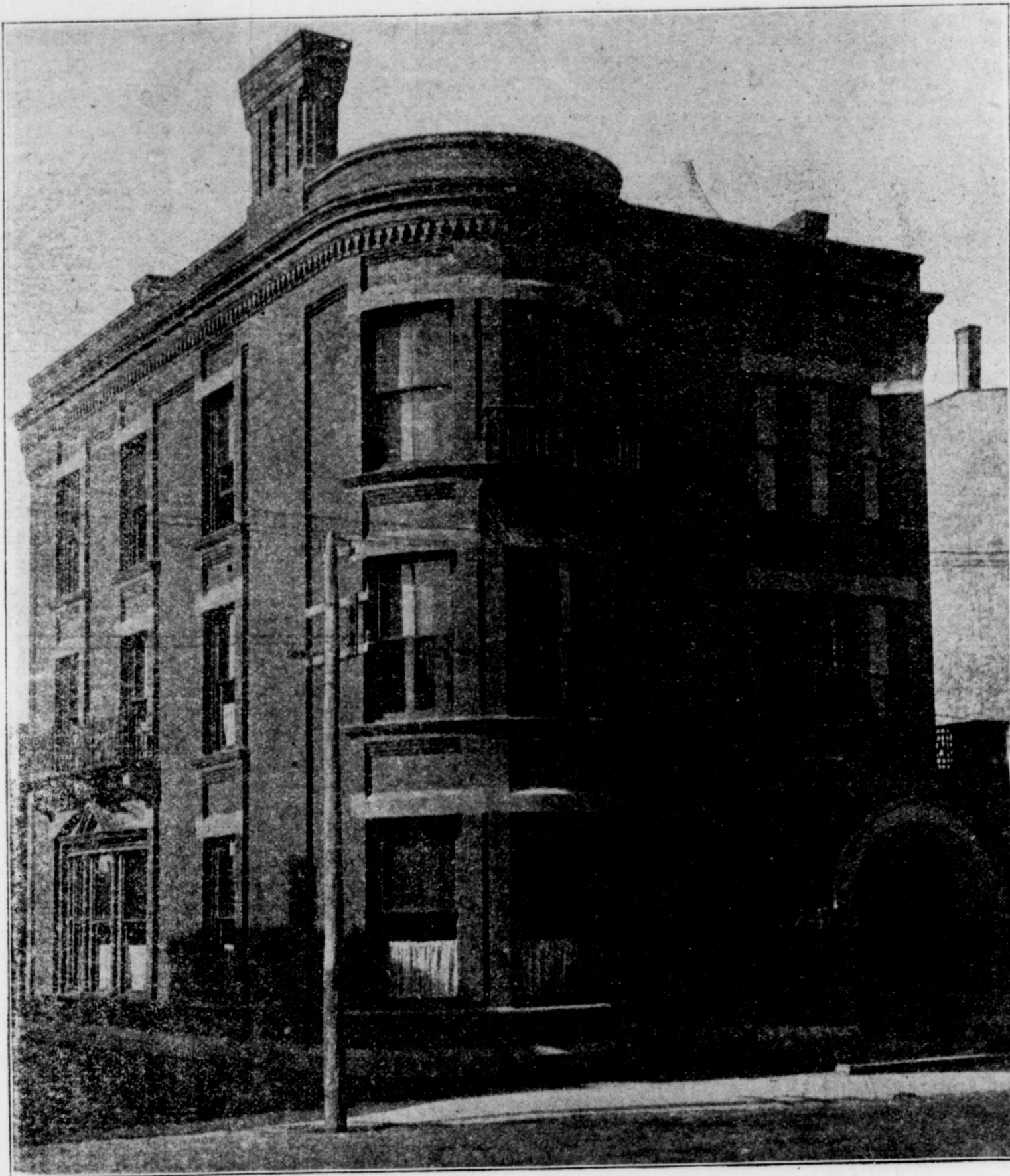
gift of Mr. J. F. McMillan, of Aspin, Col., an absent member of the club.

On the left of the hall are the parlor and dining room, handsomely furnished and decorated. The frescoing is the same throughout the whole house and the carpets are all Axminster and Wilton. The wainscoting is all of oak and walnut. There are sliding doors between the parlor and dining room so that they can be joined into one on special occasions. In rear of the hall are the kitchen and pantries and a lavatory.

On the next floor are card rooms, a private dining room, the dispensing room, the secretary's room and a reading room provided with all the leading periodicals. On the next floor is a very fine billiard room running the whole length of the building, card rooms and a lavatory. The cellars are very fine and the building is splendidly heated and lighted throughout.

An air of cosiness and comfort pervades the whole edifice, requisites dearer to the heart of the club man than surpassing elegance, and yet there has not been a sacrifice of elegance for the sake of comfort, the two are rather happily combined.

It was three years in June since the club was opened and since then it has been steadily increasing in membership. The



THE HOME OF THE UNION CLUB MEN.

club had its room, previously to the erection of their house, in the Stockton building on Prince William Street.

The present staff of officers consist of the following:—

President.—John McMillan.

Vice President.—W. H. Thorne.

Secretary.—J. E. E. Dickson.

Managing Committee.—Miles B. Dixon.

Howard D. Troop, Geo. McLeod, Geo. H. Trueman, A. W. Lovitt and Geo. W. Jones.

Mr. Tree is the efficient steward of the club and under his clever supervision the catering and conduct of the comforts of the club is all that could be desired.

The Union Club fills a great need and under clever management financially and socially it has been a success. It has been conducted on moderate lines and has kept in sympathy with the democratic spirit of our city. Progress wishes our business men the greatest possible success in their times of business and the greatest possible enjoyment in their times of business and so it wishes well to the Union Club.

Later in the week, long after midnight, we were lounging at the end of the bar when a row broke out. The proprietor of the place produced a sawed-off shotgun loaded about eight inches deep with various missiles of destruction, and ordered the room cleared. I started to go with the rest, but Bill's heavy hand on my shoulder held me fast. When the room was empty, Bill said: "Young man, never run away from a gun. Bullets can travel faster than you can. Besides, if you're going to be hit, you had better get it in front than in the back. It looks better."

Poor Bill got his in the back after all.

He was a most wonderful master of the old fashioned, thumb-cocking army revolver. I have tossed an empty tomato can twelve or fifteen feet in the air and he has hit it with two bullets from the same weapon before it struck the ground. He could shoot quite as well with his left hand as with his right, and he was so sure of whatever he went after that once in Hayes city, it is said, when he killed two negro soldiers who came in to "do him up," he wanted to be there wasn't an inch of difference in the spots where he shot them.

I said to him one morning, as he was lying at full length on a big log in front of Utter's tent, "How can a man who is being shot at by two or three other men retain such complete control of his nerves as to shoot back with accuracy?"

"Well," he replied, after a pause, as if he had never given the matter much thought, "when a man really believes the bullet isn't moulded that is going to kill him, what in hell has he got to be afraid of?"

Wild Bill was anything but a rufian, under ordinary conditions. It was strange to note the control in which he was held by Utter. I was never quite able to decide

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A WESTERN MAN'S DEATH.

Leander Richardson's Graphic Description of Wild Bill's End.

I first met Wild Bill the day I reached Deadwood City with a letter of introduction to Utter from his brother whom I had met on the way in at Johnny Bowman ranch, on Hat Creek. I was up there partly from experience and partly for a journalistic kindergarten called the Springfield Republican. Mr. Utter received me with wide open hospitality, and we started out to hunt up his partner. It was about the middle of a bright sunny afternoon, and we found Wild Bill sitting on a board which was lying on the ground in front of a saloon. His knees were drawn up in front of him as high as his chin, and he was whittling at a piece of wood with a large pocket-knife.

"Get up, Bill," said Utter. "I want you to shake hands with a friend of mine."

Wild Bill slowly arose. He came up like an elevator, and he came so high that I thought he was never going to stop. He was unusually tall, and quite spare as to flesh, but very brawny and muscular. His skin was pitted from the use of powerful mineral drugs, and his grayish eyes, which were just beginning to regain their power after almost being blinded altogether by a terrible illness, were rather dull and expressionless in repose. One day afterward I saw them glitter with a sudden ferocity that was strangely luminous, and I realized what this man must have looked like when his blood was up. But, at our meeting,

to my own satisfaction whether Utter amused or awed him. But certainly I never heard anybody take "roastings" with as little concern as that with which Bill used to take the fierce tongue lashings of his dudsque little partner. I suppose, perhaps, they fully understood each other, and knew perfectly well that behind all the words there was an impenetrable wall of manly affection.

Utter's greatest hobby was neatness, a thing which most plainmen knew nothing of. He positively would not permit Wild Bill, or California Joe, or "Bloody Dick," or any of the rest of them to enter his tent. That, he declared, was a shooting point with him. One day Bill did not get home until after breakfast was over and everybody gone. He brought with him a very superior article of Deadwood jag, and Utter's fine blankets, seen through the open flaps of the tent, was more of a temptation than he could endure. Pretty soon the big fellow was snoring calmly, rolled up in Utter's bed-clothing, and there we found him, Utter and I, when we came over to camp an hour or two later, "Colorado Curley" was at first amazed by the presumption of his partner. For a moment he stood and tentatively cursed the unconscious sleeper, and then, catching him by the heels, dragged him bodily out of the tent upon the ground. After that he ran in, pulled out his blankets, and hung them out on the surrounding trees, all the time straining his vocabulary for fresh epithets to hurl at the offender. During the whole proceeding Bill stared at him with lazy lethargy, and then, with a parting groan, climbed into his wagon and went peacefully to sleep again.

Deadwood City, full to overflowing with thieves, assassins, "skin" gamblers and other elements of disorder, was rapidly coming to the point where some sort of government was necessary. At such times on the frontier there is always a struggle, and usually a hand-to-hand combat between the lawless and the orderly classes. Wild Bill had been Marshall in other and similar places, and people began to talk of him for Marshall of Deadwood. That outcome, everybody knew, would mean a short shrift to crooks and disturbers.

In the town there was a man named Jack McCall, living under an alias. He was in the condition technically known as "stone-broke." The agitation of the marshalship was growing warm. The thieves and "skins" saw their inevitable end drawing near. It began to go round that Wild Bill could never hold office in Deadwood City. A rumor reached Utter that the big plainman, who had ruled half a dozen towns was to be assassinated. That evening he came over to camp looking serious.

"Bill, said he, after supper, 'its pretty dull around here, don't you think?'"

"Wild Bill nodded, looking into the fire. 'I've been considering,'" resumed Utter, "that we might as well take a move."

"So? Where to?"

"Well, it might be a good scheme to organize a little party," continued Utter, "persuasively, 'and go over to Standing Rock and cut out some ponies.'"

By "cutting out ponies" Utter meant the swooping down of a few white men upon a herd of Indian ponies, driving them off and selling them—a plan which, in the easy morality of the prairie, is perfectly legitimate where Indians are concerned.

Bill was silent.

"Joe will go along," resumed Utter, "urgently, 'and so will Richardson (I wasn't so sure about that), and a dozen others. Will you go?'"

"Not a d—d foot."

"Why not?"

"Well, those fellows over across the creek have laid it out to kill me, and they're going to do it, or they ain't. Any way, I don't stir out of here, unless I'm carried out."

That was when I saw the quick flash of ferocity in Wild Bill's eyes.

The conversation ended at this point. Everybody knew it was useless to argue with Wild Bill when his mind was set, and so everybody went on about his business as before. Two days afterward "these fellows over across the creek" carried out their proposition.

Five men, among them Wild Bill, were playing draw poker in a shanty saloon. Standing about were a dozen others looking on. Bill's back was towards the door. Seated next him to the left was an elderly man with his back against the wall. Something had been said about him changing seats with Bill, and after that hand the exchange would have occurred. Human life hangs on slender threads. With his back to the wall Wild Bill would have been safe enough, because few men would have dared to attack him openly.

Suddenly without a word of warning, without even the knowledge of those standing nearest to him, an undersized man right behind Bill's chair, a man whom Bill had never seen in all his life, shoved a six-shooter to his head and fired. There was a muffled report, Bill partly straightened up, and then fell over sideways, dead. The undersized man ran out. The elderly player dashed through the back door and up the side of the gulch, shouting "Murder!"

The town was in an uproar. There was a "miners" jury, consisting almost solely of skin gamblers, to sit on the case. To them the assassin told a prearranged story of how his only brother had been shot by Wild Bill, and how he had nobly avenged that brother's death. It was all a wild farce, that trial, just as Utter and his friends knew it would be, and the murderer was set free. Until now he had been absolutely without money. In a few days he turned up in Laramie City with plenty of free gold in his possession, and boastfully declaring that he had slain Wild Bill in single combat. Where did he get the gold?

McCall was arrested and taken to Yankton. Utter pursued him to the very scaffold, furnished the witnesses, paid their expenses out of his own pocket, and fairly convicted the wretched coward, who snivelled and whined like a horsewhipped hound when it came to the final showdown. Utter was faithful to his old friend to the last. Wild Bill was buried at Utter's expense. It is a late day to plaster the mud of falsehood over the memory of this fallen giant of the frontier.

A lock of the dead man's hair was cut off after his body had been prepared for burial. Utter took half of the long brown strand and I have the other half to this day. It is as glossy as spun glass and as soft as down. Near the roots there is just a touch of roughness, where the life blood of a brave, great-hearted American man gushed out as the assassin's bullet burst through his brain.