

# BILLY THE KID

## THE MOST FAMOUS OF THE BAD-MEN OF THE WEST

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By Frank J. Arkins



**A** HOWLING mob of fortune-hunters crowded into Silver City, New Mexico, in the seventies. The uncovering of mineral wealth was beset with great danger. The Apaches were on the war-path. It was hazardous to travel in the country without an escort, but the magnet of wealth in the mines drew men to the scene notwithstanding. In the citizenship of the community there were rough men, for the early days were typical of those of other mining-camps isolated in the mountains and distant from civilization.

In that community there lived a boy of seventeen years of age, respected and loved by all. He was a favorite among the young men and considered a model youth by the old. He was gentle as a child. His face was delicately molded, his skin as fair as a girl's, his hands small and fingers tapering. Lithe, graceful, self-reliant, he gave every promise of an honorable career.

This boy—William H. Bonney—was employed in a local store and was considered a most accommodating clerk. The gruff community was convulsed with horror and dumfounded with astonishment one afternoon when the news spread like wildfire that Bonney had hacked a man to death with a butcher-knife and was fleeing for his life on the back of a stolen horse.

The murder was particularly atrocious. It was the result of an altercation in which young Bonney was crossed. Prior to this the boy had never been questioned. In an instant he was transformed into a demon, within a few minutes he had added theft to murder, and in seeking a place of safety left behind him a trail as broad as though he were following a macadam road.

At the point of a revolver he compelled strangers to exchange horses with him, seized the best mounts at the various ranches along his way and spread consternation wherever he went. He followed the Mimbres river toward Deming, pursued by a posse from Silver City. Closely pressed, he escaped eastward over the Oregon mountains, when it was thought he was headed for Mexico.

### The Start of a Bad Man's Trail.

A western town was never more surprised. The majority of the people still defended him; there was some reason, his friends declared, for his strange act. But as news came of the way he was striking terror in the Valley of the Pecos where the roughest men in the southwest lived, the mind of the public was changed. From that time on his murderous exploits filled the hearts of men with fear. The boy's name in western history became forever after Billy the Kid. His name of Bonney is all but forgotten. As the Kid, he stands as one of the great historical figures of the cow country, one of the worst youths that ever lived, prince of bad men, the youngest bad man of all.

His appearance among the prospectors and amid the mining camps of the Oregon mountains was electrical. Here he conceived the idea that to evade arrest he must fight his way to the front single-handed. He boldly traded horses, obtained credit, bought supplies, because he could shoot straight with a revolver and had threatened the lives of a number of men. Then with all dispatch he pushed on to the Valley of the Pecos. This was the scene of the boy's exploits in the taking of human life.

The Pecos Valley was filled with men who had been driven out of Texas by the Rangers, and Billy the Kid's association with these men developed his mania for shedding blood. In his first altercation he realized that it was his life or the other man's. The fact that he was quick with a gun made him feared. He became embittered against one of the stockmen immediately upon his arrival in the valley.

"I'll make this valley too hot for him and dangerous to his punchers," said the boy.

At once he commenced to use this man's cowboys as targets to practice on. He began a campaign that drew upon him the enmity of everybody. The murder of these innocent men, purely to gratify a spite against their employer, made him a leader among the bands of armed thugs of the region. He had at a bound become a celebrity, and every group of bad men wanted to claim him. But the Kid would have none of that. By degrees he gathered a band of his own.

### How Many Men Did He Kill?

The Kid killed more men, wantonly and for sheer love of murder, than any other man of whom there is a record in the west. It will never be known just how many he assassinated. He was a butcher who took delight in slaying the defenseless. He knew no pang of conscience. He had not one single redeeming trait. He would murder a friend as quickly as an enemy.

He thought nothing of appearing before a cook in charge of a "chuck" wagon, on a lonely desert range, ask for something to eat, compliment the man upon the quality of the food he had prepared, with apparent gratitude. He would ask him, as if the idea had suddenly popped into his head, whether he was an officer—or had been. Then, as though in doubt, he would shoot him in his tracks. This is no exaggeration. A man whom he left for dead, and who survived long enough to tell the story, was authority for the statement, shortly after his arrival on the Pecos river.

The boy was a terror before whom everybody fled. He rode the fastest horses, he helped himself to the best there was in every community he visited, wiggled out of any number of tight places, and shot his way to freedom a dozen times.

Shortly after his arrival in the valley, he was persuaded, because of his reputation as a bad man, to assist in the arrest of three men charged with murder. They were captured without the firing of a shot, placed on horses, ironed and started jailward. To the deputy sheriff, who with him followed the prisoners across a long, dusty sand plain, he turned suddenly and said, "Let's kill those fellows."

"Why? They haven't done anything to us."

"They're guilty anyway, and we'll just save the county expense."

"No, Billy, they have not given us a chance to shoot at them—they have not tried to escape."

The deputy tried to argue with him, for he

could see the light of murder dancing in the fellow's eyes.

The Kid rode forward, compelling the officer to do likewise, and, according to the story told, shot all three men. The deputy spurred his pony, the Kid after him. They exchanged shots, and the officer escaped with a few wounds.

From that time on it was dangerous for the Kid to enter a community. He raided north through Lincoln county, which was larger than many eastern states. There was not a line of railway or telegraph in it, and no telephones. It was easy to get away.

At that time there was rivalry between the different outfits. The country was filled with bad men, and they were about evenly divided among the cowmen. Cattle stealing was a common thing. The Kid became involved in a number of rows, and he took sides. His reputation as a "killer" grew.

Undoubtedly a number of these men were killed as a result of trouble among themselves, and the killing laid to the door of the Kid. It was easy. He could not deny it. No one would have believed him if he had. Besides, the more murders credited to him, the greater the fear in which he would be held.

Thus it was that it finally became impossible to get any one to accept the position of sheriff of Lincoln county, for it was only a question of time when he would run across the youthful demon.

The Kid knew that he had terrorized the country. He knew that the instant he let down his guard he would be killed. His safety lay in continuing.

### The Turn of the Tide.

Then, one day, even those hard characters who professed to be his friends were amazed by the report that for some trivial incident he had killed a member of his own band. The outlaws were now as anxious to end his career as were the law-abiding people of the village. His friends commenced to murmur. The Kid was now reported in a dozen places at the same time, and these stories he turned to his advantage by appearing at irregular, though frequent, intervals in widely separated cow camps for more than a hundred and fifty miles north and south of the Pecos river.

Pat Garrett, a lanky Alabamian, who had helped organize the Texas Rangers and had assisted in driving the bad men out of Texas to the first water west of the Staked Plains, was invited by the cattlemen to locate in New Mexico. They wanted him to restore order. The only way that could be done was either to arrest or to kill the Kid.

Garrett's record in Texas as a man-hunter and bad man tamer was known all over the southwest. In addition to being quick with a gun, he was absolutely without fear.

He was elected without opposition and took hold with an iron hand. He was an organizer, and men flocked to his standard. They felt, instinctively, that at last a man had arrived who could cope with the situation.

### The Capture of the Kid.

In November, 1880, Garrett came upon the Kid suddenly and captured him, with several others, after killing one man.

Word had reached Garrett that the Kid and his gang of three were located in an old house a short distance from Sumner.

"We had better make plans to get him," said one of the deputies.

"The plan is to get there before he gets away. I'll tell you what to do on the way."

The way led down a sage-covered "draw," with several bends made by sand dunes around which the road curved for a distance of about five miles. Before he reached the last bend he pulled up his horse, and waiting for his deputies to come up to him, and then, in the even voice for which he was noted, said:

"I am going to ride ahead. All attention will be centered on me. That will give you a chance to surround the house. I am going to take my time and walk my horse. They may get me, but if they do I want you to make certain that you get him."

The deputies withdrew to right and left, advancing under cover of the sand hills in an ever-widening circle until they had surrounded the house. Then Garrett rode forward. From his position he could see his deputies, who had dismounted, advancing cautiously through the sagebrush. He permitted his horse to walk slowly, as though utterly unconscious of the presence of the gang. At the door he called loudly.

Some one appeared at the window and, firing a shot at the sheriff, dodged back. It was done in an instant, but in that fraction of a second the man who had fired dropped dead in his tracks! Garrett had dismounted, and with his deputies poured a fusillade of bullets through the sides of the thinly boarded shack. A white handkerchief at the window indicated the surrender of Billy the Kid and his gang.

### "You Give Me a 'Six-Gun,' Pat!"

When Garrett reached the railroad with his prisoner he was menaced by a crowd that sought to lynch the Kid.

"It looks as though they are going to get me, Pat," the Kid remarked.

It was an ugly crowd, bent on dealing to the boy the fate he was certain to meet sooner or later.

"Not if I can help it, Billy. You are under my care, and I intend to protect you."

"You give me a 'six-gun,' Pat, and stand aside a few moments, and I will clean out the whole crowd. You'll see them stampede the minute you give me a gun."

"You could help—if you played square."

"I'd have to, old man. I'm in the tightest place I ever was in my life. They'll 'get' us both, if you try it alone. They may get me, anyway. But you are up against it, if you try to defend me along."

"I'll trust you once, Billy; but understand, no foolishness. I'll 'drop' you if you try it."

The crowd grew more menacing. The demand for the life of the Kid became more insistent.



"Listen!" shouted the tall sheriff during a slight lull. "The man is my prisoner. You told me to arrest him. I have. He must have a fair trial. I know he is guilty. But it is for a jury to pronounce him so. You can not take him while I have a breath of life left, or while Billy the Kid has, either!"

Saying which he passed a revolver to the boy who had struck terror into the Pecos Valley. "You must get two of us now."

Back to back the sheriff of Lincoln county and the most noted murderer in the southwest stood. "Now, Billy," cautioned Garrett, "don't shoot unless I tell you to. Remember that without me your life is not worth two bits today."

It was impossible to tell what was working in the mind concealed behind the childish face of the Kid. It was equally as impossible to read the thoughts of the determined sheriff who waited with apparent unconcern. The crowd knew and feared the Kid. With only Garrett to fight, the members might have risked it. With a revolver in the Kid's hand, they hesitated.

Garrett was quick to see the advantage he had gained. "Now you will all move quietly away," he announced decisively.

Suddenly the crowd obeyed. Held at bay, Garrett placed the Kid aboard the train which arrived a few moments later.

### The Keeper and the "Makings."

The Kid was tried in another county. He had no friends and no defense. There were plenty of witnesses against him now that he was a prisoner. He was defended by an attorney who made a brave fight. But he was sentenced to be hanged at Lincoln in July, 1881. He was brought back and confined in a jail built after the manner of Mexican houses, of adobe brick, with thick walls around a court or patio.

The day before he was to be hanged, half a dozen horses stood in the street, lines thrown over their heads—all that is necessary to make a cow pony remain in one place.

The Kid called from the gallery to the warden: "Hi, there, Bell! I'm going to swing tomorrow. Give me the 'makings,' will you?"

"Seguro, Miguel," shouted the warden, laughing. (Translated into English, the answer meant "Sure, Mike.")

The Kid stepped to the stairs. His hands were manacled in such manner that he had little use of them. The warden reached in his vest pocket for the cigarette paper, which he placed in his left hand, and with his right felt in his hip pocket for a sack of tobacco.

Like a flash the Kid raised his manacled hands and struck Bell square in the temple. The warden staggered. As he did so the Kid jerked Bell's revolver from his holster, and dealt the jailer a blow on the head that crushed his skull. "Unfasten the jewelry, and we'll both get away!"

He shouted these words to another prisoner standing inside a cell. The Kid had been allowed the freedom of the galleries. He passed the keys taken from the prostrate warden to the man in the cell, who unlocked his handcuffs. Then, leveling the warden's revolver at the prisoner, he hissed:

"Give me back the keys!"

It was the work of but a moment to reach the barred gate that led into the street where the horses stood. A glance, and he took it all in. From where he stood he could see the form of the warden. Leveling his revolver, he fired a shot that ended his life, and then shot the man who blocked the door.

Once outside, he started a fusillade of bullets up and down the street to keep everybody in the houses. In another instant he was on: the best horse and had stampeded the others so that pursuit would be delayed. In a few moments he was out of sight.

Garrett was about twenty miles away at the time after some rustlers. Word was sent to him and he returned post haste, heard the story from excited lips, and stopped only long enough to saddle a fresh horse. Accompanied by a few friends he took the Kid's trail.

At the end of forty-eight hours of flight, when tired out, Billy the Kid stopped at the house of a man named Maxwell, near Sumner. Retiring, he figured, doubtless, that Garrett would have to pause for rest also.

It was early the second morning, probably about 3 a. m., when the silent sheriff saw in front of him the cabin in which the Kid slept. He and his men dismounted and approached the house. Garrett reached the porch with his deputies and quietly stepped into Maxwell's room.

There are several accounts of what took place. One is to the effect that Garrett left his deputies stationed outside beyond the house. He was whispering to Maxwell, when the Kid, who was a light sleeper, awoke, and tiptoeing across the porch, entered, revolver in hand, and asked: "Who was that who just came? Where is he?" From his position Garrett could see him distinctly, and had the Kid been looking, he might have distinguished the form of the sheriff, standing by the bedside of Maxwell. The Kid had his revolver in hand, prepared to use it. Garrett knew that, and fired the single shot that killed the Kid.

## INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By E. O. SELLERS, Director of Evening Department The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

### LESSON FOR FEBRUARY 16

#### THE CALL OF ABRAM.

LESSON TEXT—GEN. 12:1-9. GOLDEN TEXT—"I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing."—Gen. 12:2.

The Bible does not profess to be a chronological history of the world. It does profess to reveal the steps of the redemptive process of God where by fallen man shall be justified in his sight. So it is that we find but little record of those hundreds of years between this lesson and the events recorded in that of last week. We do, however, find all that is essential in the history of the plan of salvation.

The cleansing of the earth by water was not for long, since we soon see men relapsing into sin.

1. "Get thee out of thy country," v. 1-3. In this lesson we behold God again selecting a single man who shall be the head of a race. We do not of course infer that Abram received an audible call, though God could certainly speak as he did on other and numerous occasions. God calls today by these inward impulses and desires, by the voice of duty and conscience, by the force of circumstances, and by the word. The Bible is God's greatest organ of speech.

#### Abram's Journey.

From Acts 7:2 we learn that the call first came to Abram when he was in Mesopotamia, probably on the right bank of the Euphrates river, and that his obedience to that call was only partial. Abram got out of his own country, but not into the land promised unto him. He journeyed probably 500 miles to the northwest but got only as far as Haran, which was not the promised land. It took, evidently, the death of his father to move him from that place, Acts 7:4. Abram went not knowing the kind of a land, nor was he told where it was to be, Heb. 11:8. His call was threefold, (1) "for thy country," (2) "thy kindred," (3) "thy father's house." Thus we see that God demanded a complete separation from the old life, associations and affections.

II. And Abram departed," v. 4-6. "To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams," I Samuel 15:22. Abram had just enough faith to obey. We do not read that he asked for enlightenment; he saw not the land, but he heard the call and staggered not at the promise. He was fully persuaded that God was able to perform and therefore it was reckoned unto him for righteousness, Acts 7:20-22. But he did not go alone. Already God had begun to redeem his promise (v. 2). Abram's character was such and his name of such import that his nephew Lot accompanied him. Lot, however, did not possess that same faith nor a like character. Lot went "with him" and not, like Abram, with God. Abram also took his own family with him, and "all their substance" v. 5. Nothing was left behind to tempt him to return. "And they went forth into the land of Canaan," a type of the life into which we are called in Christ Jesus. Thus we are called in Christ Jesus. This was such and his name of such import that his nephew Lot accompanied him. Lot, however, did not possess that same faith nor a like character. Lot went "with him" and not, like Abram, with God. Abram also took his own family with him, and "all their substance" v. 5. Nothing was left behind to tempt him to return. "And they went forth into the land of Canaan," a type of the life into which we are called in Christ Jesus. Thus we are called in Christ Jesus.

III. "And the Canaanite was in the land," v. 6-9. All was not so easily settled for Abram. "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of troubles," no life is devoid of its testing, Eph. 6:12, R. V., and so as Abram journeyed he met with enemies. His Place of Rest. Passing on from thence he reached a place of rest (v. 8). This is a beautiful lesson on consecration. Here is Abram at "a mountain on the east of Bethel" (house of God). Notice he is on the east of Bethel facing westward, the direction in which he has been journeying, having Hal (ruins) at his back, and "there he builded an altar unto the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord" (v. 8). Let us all remember to turn our backs upon the world, and as we face the house, the altar of God, render him undivided, whole-hearted worship and service. God's appearance to Abram was again in connection with obedience. God is just as ready to assure us as we journey through this humdrum, toilsome journey of life, ever ready to meet us and to make us glad by the way.

Notice that Abram in a strange land did not neglect God's altar like many a present-day pilgrim, nor to give testimony of his faith for "called upon the name of the Lord." Like the Christ who "had not where to lay his head," so Abram was a "pilgrim."

For the older classes consider such questions as, Every Man's Life a Plan of God; Our Debt to Judaism; Our Treatment of Others Who Are Pilgrims, Strangers, e. g., immigrants.

For the younger do not omit Lot and the dramatic, high-light picture of that journey from Ur of the Chaldees (use a map). Emphasize how much better it is to be a blessing than to seek a blessing for one's self. "Not what has happened to myself today, but what has happened to others through me."

"So on I go, not knowing I would not if I might; I'd rather walk in the dark with God than walk alone in the light; I'd rather go by faith with Him than go alone by sight."

—Dr. David J. Burrell.

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