

# 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 backed 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 pangs 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 us, anyway. But you are up against it, if you try to defend me alone."

"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.



## HONOR DAY OF MARTYRED SAINT

The martyred saint whose name refines and beautifies the merry customs of the ancient Roman festival of the Lupercalia knew naught of those sufferings of his death seem to assort ill with the season of the mating birds and the jolly forms of love-making with which that season has been celebrated from time immemorial.

It is not known whether his place in the calendar was assigned to the middle of February with the purpose of lending a more serious tone to the giddiness of Roman youths and maidens in drawing their sweethearts by lot, but certain it is that, though the lottery of drawing one's valentine continued until a late period of English history, it changed to a form more worthy of approval by the serious and saintly man whose name commends it.

Though in this country and this generation the proper observance of St. Valentine's day is limited to the anonymous sending of tender or sentimental missives, leaving the recipient to solve the mystery of the sender in his or her own imagination, there have been in the past many pretty or fanciful notions associated with the day.

One was that the first person of the opposite sex one met on St. Valentine's morning was to be his or her companion for life, and we may imagine the care with which the votaries of this little superstition avoided meeting the wrong person. Sometimes young women sought to decide the personality of their valentines by dreaming, and even resorted to indigestible food at going to bed on St. Valentine's eve in order to induce the dreams.

A sport of the young folks in England was to celebrate a little festival on St. Valentine's eve, in which the company was divided into couples by lot and the young man was expected to be attentive for some days to the lady who was drawn as his valentine—taking her to parties, and so forth. In these days the fortunate or unfortunate young man who had drawn a valentine in this way would be expected to pay something for carriage hire and theater tickets. It cost the courtiers of Charles II. something to be chosen as a valentine, for Pepys, in his diary, informs us of a certain belle of the court who received a jewel of £800 value from her valentine of one year and a rig worth £300 from her valentine of another year.

No true disciple of St. Valentine will indulge in the license of the caricatures and labels that are nowadays sent through the mails under cover of the secrecy that is sacred to his day. They are altogether alien to the spirit of the season.



**Old-Time Valentine.**  
The earnest and most popular St. Valentine's day jingle that has been handed down to the present time:

The rose is red,  
The violet blue,  
Sugar is sweet,  
And so are you."

In many of the European countries the St. Valentine day kiss was exchanged between young people as a token of good will. The exact nature of such an osculatory performance is somewhat vague. Though the same conscientious chronicler does not mention the relationship, it suggested that the St. Valentine day kiss is a third cousin at least, deceased, of the famous "soul" kiss. There is some doubt on this point, however, for in no way can an exegesis of the word "affinity" lead the investigator back to that time. On the other hand, the fact that this custom is now in vogue universally—not on St. Valentine's day, but on other days, and far into the night as well—is significant. The only difference is that the so-called St. Valentine day kiss of the present is a token of good will—and other things.

**Sought Their Sweethearts.**  
In England the schoolgirl of a half a century ago plucked at the buttons on their gowns and uttered in a sing-song monotone on St. Valentine's day the verse:

"Tinker, tailor,  
Soldier, sailor,  
Apothecary,  
Ploughboy, thief."

If, after sing-singing these words for a stated number of times they should first meet other than the one on whom all mentioned in their roundelay their hearts were set they scattered in great flight.

**Scott's Tribute to the Day.**  
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,  
And men below, and saints above;  
For love is heaven, and heaven is love.  
—Sir Walter Scott.

## A LUCKLESS VALENTINE



I long had loved a winsome maid,  
But when my timid tongue essayed,  
Without avail, to tell the tale,  
I then resolved, though lips might fail,  
That pen should speak—and so I wrote  
My lady an impassioned note.

In every phrase to lovers sweet,  
I laid my homage at her feet;  
Extolled her face and form—in fine,  
I humbly begged that she'd be mine.  
Then wretched it round with bloom and vine,  
And signed it thus: "Thy Valentine."

That eve we met—I'll ne'er forget—  
His pain pervades my being yet.  
Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were bright,  
With young affection's tender light.  
"Dear Jack," said she, "you ought to see  
The valentine that came to me."

"'Twas twined in roses all about,  
And arrows sped from Cupid's bow;  
And in the midst a rhythmic line  
That breathed such burning love divine  
It made my heart with rapture thrill—  
I knew at once that 'twas from Will."

"To you, dear Jack, I may confess,"  
She said, unheeding my distress,  
"That love is blind, or Will would see  
I'm quite as much in love as he;  
But he is such a bashful beau  
I wish you'd kindly tell him so."  
Moral—  
When next I pen a lovelorn line,  
I'll sign it "Jack," not "Valentine."  
—Harriet Bunker Austin, in National Magazine.

### Valentine Day in Ireland.

In Ireland the great feature of St. Valentine's day is the breakdown dance. All the boys and all the girls engaged in it, the couple dancing the longest winning the coveted applause. The victorious couple is looked upon as well mated, and not infrequently a wedding follows during Easter tide. The dance itself is indeed a spectacle. With much ceremony the door of the barn is lifted from its hinges and the dance commenced as soon as the fiddler or the player of the bagpipes orders the couples out. The floor of the barn is of mud; hence the door is laid on the ground to form a suitable surface for the dancers. Goldsmith describes the dancers in his "Deserted Village":

"The dancing pair that simply sought re-  
newal,  
By holding out to tire each other down."

The absolute whole-heartedness of the dance and the fierceness of these tests of endurance must be seen to be appreciated. Though the occasion is one of the utmost jollity and good will, the contestants are in dead earnest in their endeavors to win.

### Dean Swift's Gentle Protest.

The gentle Dean Swift, in writing to a friend, describes his first reception of a comic valentine:

"I was seated in my library when the postmaster arrived and I opened the bag. What was my surprise to find my first greeting on St. Valentine's morning to be a representation of a fat person, with a body like a pig and a head like a doll. Of course, it grieved me, for I always considered the day one devoted to everything beautiful in life. But I felt far more compassion for the unfortunate mental condition of the sender than I did for the feelings of the recipient, which were, I assure you, quite healed before I finished breakfast."

The simplicity of this gentle protest, scarcely a rebuke, is pathetic. Much more kindly and considerate is the tender missive, even though it be sentimental, like the following:

"If you'll be mine  
I will be thine,  
And so Good  
Morning, Valentine—"

For St. Valentine's day is a day of joy, of love, of happiness.

