

KIOWA BILL'S LAST DEBT.

Among those in attendance at the Northwest Texas Conference of the Southern Methodist church at Temple, Texas, this week is a Rev. Mr. Snarley.

Last November Mr. Snarley was appointed as the preacher on a small prairie "circuit," one "appointment" of which was near the big Silverton ranch, in the southwestern part of the state. One afternoon he put in his appearance in that section of the country riding a pony that looked much jaded and worn with the hard journey it had made during the day. He inquired anxiously for any members of his church, but found it rather difficult to locate them. The prairie was so big and the church so little that the latter was well nigh lost in the former. To make matters worse, it seemed that the stockmen had very uncertain opinions as to who belonged to the church and who did not. Every man he met seemed of the opinion that his nearest neighbor, some eight or ten miles to the Southwest, might perhaps be a church member, but he couldn't say for sure. He frequently added, though, that in his opinion if the other fellow were a church member at all, he was "a mighty pore one."

In one case, church membership was attributed to a man because he took two newspapers, and in another because he wore "store clothes." All these supposed clues proved deceptive. Toward nightfall, just as the preacher and his horse had about reached the last stage of exhaustion, they stopped before a dugout, through the roof of which was pouring a stream of smoke that betokened the near approach of the supper hour.

"Hello!" shouted the preacher. "Hello!" returned a man appearing at the door with a Winchester in his hand.

"Does Brother Kiowa live here?" "Which?" "I say, does Brother Kiowa live here?"

"Don't know him," snarled the man, glancing narrowly at the stranger.

"I—I'm sorry," said Mr. Snarley, mildly. "There seems to be some mistake. You see I'm the new preacher, and—"

"The new which?" "Preacher—Methodist preacher."

"I've been trying all evening to find some member of my church, but they seem hard to find. A few miles back I found two gentlemen that pointed out your dugout and said Brother Kiowa lived here, and that he was a church member of the regular shooting kind."

"The h— they did!" was the scowling reply. "Was one of them a tall, slender man with a big red mustache?"

"I believe he was."

"I guess that was Bony Johnson. Him an' me has been gunning for each other for a right smart time lately. He was puttin' up a job on you, pardner, an' if I was you I'd lay for him. My name's Kiowa Bill, but I ain't your brother, nor nobody else's. The only brother I ever had was killed by some Mexicans down in Greasy Gulch nearly seven years ago. Bony thought he was sendin' you to the toughest man in Texas when he sent you to me, but I guess I'm about as good as most of 'em around here. Get down, pardner, an' come in an' bunk with me to-night—if you ain't afraid to."

Notwithstanding his disappointment, in not finding a member of his flock, Rev. Snarley was too tired to refuse this invitation. As he dismounted he noticed Kiowa—whose name the cowboys all insist upon pronouncing Kiowa—was regarding him rather closely.

"Say, pardner," his host finally inquired deferentially, "ain't you lost something?"

"Not that I know of. What?" "Yore gun."

"Gun? I never had one. I don't need one."

"I say in my business I don't need any gun."

Kiowa Bill looked puzzled for a moment. He was evidently wondering what kind of business a preacher could have not to need any gun, but he merely drew a long breath and said nothing.

That night after the frugal supper of tough beef, doughy biscuit and black coffee the two men sat on the dirt floor of the dugout and engaged in a desultory conversation.

"I've allers felt sorter lackin' in some plints, an' I've tried to make it up on this'n."

Then there came a moment's pause in the conversation.

"I know of one debt you haven't paid, Mr. Kiowa, and it's a big one, too," said the preacher.

"Dammed if you do," retorted his host, a trifle warmly. "There ain't none ever been presented to me that I ain't paid, an' in Texas you kads' use a man for debt until he's been axed for payment—at least wunst."

Then the preacher, using I know not what words, kindly but clearly explained the debt which every man owes—the debt to him who, at a very great price indeed, purchased a right to the life of all the world.

It was the first time that Kiowa Bill had ever had this debt presented to him for payment.

"A gentleman will allers give his debtors a little time," was all he would say on the subject.

One night about a week after Rev. Mr. Snarley's visit to Kiowa Bill the much hands of the big Silverton were all engaged in the rather arduous task of trying to soothe a big herd that had taken it into its head to stampede. The Silverton boys had probably never heard of Rudyard Kipling nor of his Hill Ballad beginning:

"I had been singing to keep them quiet, but that was exactly what they were doing, nevertheless. The reason this line is not more generally understood is that the people who know much about Kipling mostly know very little about cattle, and the people who know much about cattle mostly never even heard of Kipling."

It is often said that human nature is much the same the world over, and it seems that cow nature must be much the same, also. At any rate, the Silverton men on the Texas prairie had been doing much as the speaker in Kipling's poem about the hill country in far-away India did—singing to soothe the immense herd of big, nervous, excited brutes into quiet.

It was much as if a group of nurses had been trying to soothe to sleep a crowd of restless, overgrown babies. The big hulks of the cattle loomed up black and somber even in the starlight of a clear but moonless Texas night. The big forms shifted uneasily from place to place, and occasionally the big horns would crash together with a crack like that of timbers striking together. The noise was unpleasantly suggestive of the damage that might result if the herd should take a notion to run.

Davis, my informant was there, and so was Bony Johnson, the man for whom Kiowa Bill had been "gunning"; so were all of Silverton's men except his line riders, and they were fast coming in. These men sang until they had well nigh exhausted their not very extensive musical repertoire, and then they rested.

They were not hoarse—a Texas cowboy never becomes hoarse—but they stood warming themselves around one of the fires that had been lighted to assist in quieting the cattle. Each man held his horse's bridle, for he knew that it might be necessary to be quick in mounting. Stampeding cattle give even less warning than do cyclones.

"Say, Bony!" said one, "it was a daisy shame for you to send that preacher fellow to Kiowa Bill's inquirin' for 'Brother Kiowa' like you did, but I'd like to 'a seen Kiowa's face when he come."

"The feller asked me if they wuz any 'good Methodists' livin' around here," answered Bony, with a grin; "an' I guess, after all, Kiowa's about as good as any of us. I don't think there is no scraphime out here."

"Kiowa's shone just about as good as could be expected, considerin' what a devil he had for a mother and what a hell hound he had for a daddy. You couldn't expect a young rattlesnake to turn to a toad—well, to a school marm."

"Say!" interjected a third speaker, "the ol' man's done sent for Kiowa to come in as soon as he's rid his line, an' he'll just about be gettin' in by now. Listen for his ol' whoop just about when he gets to the top of that Baldwin knob yonder. You all know it of old. Better limber up yore gun, Bony, when you hear it."

For a few moments all listened. There was silence, save for the low, confused noise of the big herd, and the occasional cracking together of their horns. Suddenly, clear and high above all the other noises, rose one long, wild cry, in which defiance, triumph and a nameless, intangible element of rejoicing seemed to be mingled.

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Before Bony could see to his gun or do anything else a new sound filled all the air. It was a dull, sullen roar, like that of a coming storm. The whole immense herd had taken fright and was beginning to move. Into the saddles sprang the riders and away they dashed. Argue with an iceberg, the advancing tide, a forest fire, or a cyclone, if you choose, but not with a big herd of cattle that has definitely decided to run. The riders scattered in all directions. Bony with his right hand was feeling for his gun just at the moment when his pony stepped in a prairie dog hole. Down went both pony and rider, but before Bony could disengage his hand the pony was gone. Just then the figure of another man on horseback loomed up in the darkness.

"Stop!" roared Bony. "No, by G—! Is it you?"

It was Kiowa. In the fraction of a second he had dismounted, and was holding his horse by the bridle. "Up!" he shouted, impetuously, above the roar of the cattle.

Bony sprang to the saddle. "He couldn't save us both, but he can get you out of this—if you ride like hell!" screamed Kiowa, and with the last word he struck the pony a heavy blow on the nose. The frightened beast bounded away.

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"What's he sayin'?" asked some one.

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HOKE SMITH AND THE TRANS-CONTINENTAL RAILROADS.

A recent news report has this paragraph touching Secretary of the Interior Smith's supposed plan of treating the Pacific bond aided railroad:

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"Some time ago the secretary held up all patents of lands to the Pacific railroads which were bond aided, amounting to 7,000,000 acres. Whether this is an indication that he intends to make some rather radical recommendations to congress is not known, but it is a fact that the secretary has been securing statistics relative to the earnings of the roads and their capacity to earn enough to pay a moderate interest on the present indebtedness. It is expected that congress will undertake to legislate upon the subject of the Pacific railroads' indebtedness during the coming session, and the secretary will no doubt recommend a plan of settlement."

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For a few moments all listened. There was silence, save for the low, confused noise of the big herd, and the occasional cracking together of their horns. Suddenly, clear and high above all the other noises, rose one long, wild cry, in which defiance, triumph and a nameless, intangible element of rejoicing seemed to be mingled.

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THIRTY years' observation of Castoria with the patronage of millions of persons, permit us to speak of it without guessing: It is unquestionably the best remedy for Infants and Children the world has ever known. It is harmless. Children like it. It gives them health. It will save their lives. In it Mothers have something which is absolutely safe and practically perfect as a child's medicine.

Castoria destroys Worms. Castoria allays Feverishness. Castoria prevents vomiting Sour Curls. Castoria cures Diarrhoea and Wind Colic. Castoria relieves Teething Troubles. Castoria cures Constipation and Flatulency. Castoria neutralizes the effects of carbonic acid gas or poisonous air. Castoria does not contain morphine, opium, or other narcotic property. Castoria assimilates the food, regulates the stomach and bowels, giving healthy and natural sleep. Castoria is put up in one-size bottles only. It is not sold in bulk. Don't allow any one to sell you anything else on the plan or promise that it is "just as good" and "will answer every purpose."

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THE COST OF BRITISH SHIPS OF WAR.

A parliamentary paper recently issued throws much light upon the cost of warships and their armament, machinery, etc. The prices given are mainly those to contractors, but from other sources the expense of building ships in the public dockyards can be obtained. No real comparison can be drawn between the two, of course, for the maintenance of the public yards is imperative for many sound reasons, and, therefore, there are items connected with the cost of vessels built in them from which those constructed in the private yards are free. However, when we remember that the private builder has to make a profit, we must not be surprised at the cost of employing them, and it has been fully demonstrated that it is as essential to the efficiency of our resources to give experience to the private contractors as it is to maintain public establishments. Messrs. Thomson, of Clydebank, for the hull and machinery of the battleship Jupiter, are to receive £732,683, and for the cruiser Terrible about £270,000. Messrs. Laird will receive for the battleship Mars, £733,211; and the Barrow Company as much for the cruiser Powerful as Thomson do for her sister ship. Messrs. Mauley, who are the agents for the Belleville boilers in England, receive in royalties for the French gun, £10,000, but they will not construct the boilers in their shops. The Talbot class of cruiser, of which several are being constructed in Scotland, costs about £210,000 apiece, while the torpedo boat destroyers average about £25,000 apiece.