CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK HILLS FEVER.

There had raged for many years a war between the Sioux Nation, composed of about a dozen different tribes of the same race under various designations, and nearly all the other Indian tribes of the Northwest. The Northern Cheyennes were generally confederated with the Sioux in the field, and the common enemy would seem to have been the Crow, or Absarake, Nation. The Sioux and Cheyennes together were more than a match for all the other tribes combined, and even at this day the former peoples hold their numerical superiority unimpaired. There must be nearly 70,000 Sioux and their kindred tribes in existence, and they still possess, at least, 5,000 able-bodied warriors, more or less well armed. But times have greatly changed since the spring of 1876. Then nearly all of Dakota, Northern Nebraska, Northern Wyoming, Northern and Eastern Montana lay at the mercy of the savages, who, since the completion of the treaty of 1868, which filled them with ungovernable pride, had been mainly successful in excluding all white men from the immense region, which may be roughly described as bounded on the east by the 104th meridian; on the west by the Big Horn mountains; on the south by the North Platte, and on the north by the Yellowstone river. In fact, the northern boundary, in Montana, extended prac-
tically to the frontier of the British possessions. About 240,000 square miles were comprised in the lands ceded, or virtually surrendered, by the Government to the Indians—one-half for occupation and the establishment of agencies, farms, schools and other mediums of civilization; while the other half was devoted to hunting grounds, which no white man could enter without the special permission of the Indians themselves. All this magnificent territory was turned over and guaranteed to the savages by solemn treaty with the United States Government. The latter made the treaty with what may be termed undignified haste. The country, at the time, was sick of war. Colonel Fetterman, with his command of nearly one hundred men and three officers, had been overwhelmed and massacred by the Sioux, near Fort Phil Kearney, in December, 1866. Other small detachments of the army had been slaughtered here and there throughout the savage region. The old Montana emigrant road had been paved with the bodies and reddened with the blood of countless victims of Indian hatred, and, indeed, twenty years ago, strange as it may now appear to American readers, nobody, least of all the authorities at Washington, thought that what was then a howling, if handsome, wilderness, would be settled within so short a period by white people. Worse than all else, the Government weakly agreed to dismantle the military forts established along the Montana emigrant trail, running within a few miles of the base of the Big Horn range, namely, Fort Reno, situated on Middle Fork of the Powder river; Fort Phil Kearney, situated on Clear Fork of the same stream, and Fort C. F.
Smith, situated on the Big Horn river, all these being on the east side of the celebrated mountain chain. The Sioux had no legitimate claim to the Big Horn region. A part of it belonged originally to the Crows, whom the stronger tribe constantly persecuted, and who, by the treaty of '68, were placed at the mercy of their ruthless enemies. Other friendly tribes, such as the Snakes, or Shoshones, and the Bannocks, bordered on the ancient Crow territory, and were treated as foemen by the greedy Sioux and the haughty Cheyennes. The abolition of the three forts named fairly inflated the Sioux. The finest hunting grounds in the world had fallen into their possession, and the American Government, instead of standing by and strengthening the Crows, their ancient friends and allies, unwisely abandoned the very positions that would have held the more ferocious tribes in check. The Crows had a most unhappy time of it after the treaty was ratified. Their lands were constantly raided by the Sioux. Several desperate battles were fought, and, finally, the weaker tribe was compelled to seek safety beyond the Big Horn river.

Had the Sioux and Crows been left to settle the difficulty between themselves, few of the latter tribe would be left on the face of the earth to-day. The white man's government might make what treaties it pleased with the Indians, but it was quite a different matter to get the white man himself to respect the official parchment. Three-fourths of the Black Hills region, and all of the Big Horn, were barred by the Great Father and Sitting Bull against the enterprise of the daring, restless and acquisitive Caucasian race. The military expe-
ditions, under Generals Sully, Connors, Stanley and Custer—all of which were partially unsuccessful—had attracted the attention of the country to the great region already specified. The beauty and variety of the landscape, the immense quantities of the noblest species of American game; the serrated mountains, and forest-covered hills; the fine grazing lands and rushing streams, born of the snows of the majestic Big Horn peaks; and, above all else, the rumor of great gold deposits, the dream of wealth—which hurled Cortez on Mexico and Pizarro on Peru, fired the Caucasian heart with the spirit of adventure and exploration, to which the attendant and well-recognized danger lent an additional zest. The expedition of General Custer, which entered the Black Hills proper—those of Dakota—in 1874, confirmed the reports of "gold finds," and, thereafter, a wall of fire, not to mention a wall of Indians, could not stop the encroachments of that terrible white race before which all other races of mankind, from Thibet to Hindostan, and from Algiers to Zululand, have gone down. At the news of gold, the grizzled '49er shook the dust of California from his feet, and started overland, accompanied by daring comrades, for the far-distant "Hills;" the Australian miner left his pick half buried in the antipodean sands, and started, by ship and saddle, for the same goal; the diamond hunter of Brazil and of "the Cape;" the veteran "prospectors" of Colorado and Western Montana; the "tar heels" of the Carolinian hills; the "reduced gentlemen" of Europe; the worried and worn city clerks of London, Liverpool, New York or Chicago; the stout English yeoman, tired of high
rents and poor returns; the sturdy Scotchman, tempted from stubborn plodding after wealth to seek fortune under more rapid conditions; the light-hearted Irishman, who drinks in the spirit of adventure with his mother's milk; the daring mine delvers of Wales and of Cornwall; the precarious gambler of Monte Carlo—in short, every man who lacked fortune, and who would rather be scalped than remain poor, saw in the vision of the Black Hills, El Dorado; and to those picturesquely sombre eminences the adventurers of the earth—some honest and some the opposite—came trooping in masses, "like clouds at eventide."

In vain did the Government issue its proclamations; in vain were our veteran regiments of cavalry and infantry, commanded by warriors true and tried, drawn up across the path of the daring invaders; in vain were arrests made, baggage seized, horses confiscated and wagons burned; no earthly power could hinder that bewildering swarm of human ants. They laughed at the proclamations, evaded the soldiers, broke jail, did without wagons or outfit of any kind, and, undaunted by the fierce war whoops of the exasperated Sioux, rushed on to the fight for gold with burning hearts and naked hands! Our soldiers, whom no foe, white, red or black, could make recreant to their flag upon the field of honor, overcome by the moral epidemic, deserted by the squad to join the grand army of indomitable adventurers. And soon, from Buffalo Gap to Inyan Kara, and from Bear Butte to Great Cañon, the sound of the pick and spade made all the land resonant with the music of Midas. Thickly as the mushrooms grow in the summer nights on
the herbage-robbed sheep range, rose "cities" innumerable, along the Spearfish and the Deadwood and Rapid creeks. Placer and quartz mines developed with marvelous rapidity, and, following the first, and boldest, adventurers, the eager, but timid and ease-loving, capitalists, who saw Indians in every sage brush, came in swarms. Rough board shanties, and hospital tents, were the chief "architectural" features of the new "cities," which swarmed with gamblers, harlots and thieves, as well as with honest miners. By the fall of 1875, the northern segment of the irregular, warty geological formation, known as the Black Hills, was prospected, "staked" and, in fairly good proportion, "settled," after the rough, frontier fashion. Pierre and Bismarck, on the Missouri river, and Sidney and Cheyenne, on the Union Pacific railroad, became the supply depots of the new mining regions, and, at that period, enjoyed a prosperity which they have not equaled since. All the passes leading into "the Hills," from the points mentioned, swarmed with hostile Indians, most of whom were well fed at the agencies, and all of whom boasted of being better armed, and better supplied with fixed ammunition, than the soldiers of our regular army. The rocks of Buffalo Gap and Red Cañon, particularly, rang with the rifle shots of the savages, and the return fire of the hardy immigrants, many of whom paid with their lives the penalty of their ambition. The stages that ran to "the Hills" from the towns on the Missouri and the Union Pacific rarely ever escaped attack—sometimes by robbers, but oftenest by Indians. All passengers, even the women, who were, at that time, chiefly composed of the
rough, if not absolutely immoral, class, traveled with arms in their hands ready for immediate action. Border ruffians infested all the cities, and, very soon, became almost as great a menace to life and property as the savages themselves. Murders and suicides occurred in abundance, as the gambling dens increased and the low class saloons multiplied. Notwithstanding these discouragements, the period of 1874, '75 and '76 was the Augustan era, if the term be not too transcendental, of the Black Hills. The placer mines were soon exhausted, and, as it required capital to work the quartz ledges, the poor miners, or the impatient ones, who hoped to get rich in a day, quickly “stampeded” for more promising regions, and left the mushroom “cities” to the capitalists, the wage workers, the gamblers, the women in scarlet, and to these, in later days, may be added the rancheros, or cattle men. Morality has greatly improved in “the Hills” since 1876, and business has settled down to a steady, old-fashioned gait, but the first settlers still remember, with vague regret, the stirring times of old, when gold dust passed as currency; when whisky was bad and fighting general; when claims were held dear and life cheap; when the bronzed hunter, or long-haired “scout,” strutted around in half savage pride, and when the renowned “Wild Bill,” who subsequently met a fate so sudden and so awful, was at once the glory and the terror of that active, but primitive, community. But enough of historical retrospection. I will now resume my narrative of the long and weary march, which began at Fort Russell in “the ides of May,” and terminated at Fort Laramie in the last days of September, 1876.