

A GOOD INDIAN

By DR. JOHN HOLT LACY

In almost every community there is someone who has established a reputation as the champion liar of the district.

Forty years ago Clifton did not differ in this respect from the surrounding towns.

There was a man there (his residence was wherever his roll of blankets, his broncho and two pack-mules happened to be) who excelled so greatly that whatever he said had to be taken "cum grano salis." No one would believe him under oath. In fact, the higher the stack of Bibles he swore upon, the less credence was given him.

His name was Montgomery, and he was a man of small stature, with long hair falling over his shoulders and he wore a buck-skin suit.

He made a good living by selling to the Mexicans jerked venison, of which they were very fond. In season he did a good deal of trapping, and many a load of deer, bear, beaver, mountain lion, fox and coyotes' pelts he brought in for sale.

His pockets were usually filled with pieces of quartz, showing gold, silver, or lead, so that he was also something of a prospector. He rarely remained in one locality more than a few days and spent most of his time roaming over the White and Blue mountains, where game at that time was very plentiful.

A few days before this incident happened of which we relate he had been camped up on the Blue with William Sparks, a former well known resident of the district now deceased. Sparks had an ordinary yellow cur which followed him as long as there was anything to eat, while Montgomery owned a dog which he called "Ring," that was supposed to be the best bear dog in the whole southwest.

On morning while Montgomery was eating his breakfast, Ring sneaked up to the rope upon which the venison jerky was drying and pulled it down. Hastily leaving his plate beside the fire, he drove the dog away. In the meantime Sparks' yellow cur came and ate up everything on the plate and was quietly licking it when Montgomery turned. This so incensed Montgomery that he said he would not camp with a man who owned a dog with so little manners. He divided the grub and pulled

out. A few days later he drifted into Clifton and stopped in front of my residence. Knowing him very well and expecting to hear of some of his wild, hair-breadth escapes from the Apaches, I asked him if he had seen any Indians. At that time they were constantly on the war-path.

“Yes, yes,” he carelessly replied, “I had a little brush with them over on Stray Horse Divide between the Blue and Eagle creek. It had been raining and I saw some fresh moccasin tracks. About this time Ring began to bristle up and get behind me. Just then out stepped an Indian from behind a pine, fifty yards in front of me and fired at me point blank. In my excitement and desire to get out of range I stumbled and fell flat on my back. The Indian evidently thought that he had got me and stopped to pick out an empty shell which had gotten stuck in his gun. At that moment I grabbed my gun and put a bullet through his head.”

I listened to this yarn with amused indifference and thought that this was perhaps the biggest one I had ever heard him tell. Continuing, Montgomery said, “I thought you fellows would think I was lying, so I brought in the proof.”

With that he turned to his broncho which stood behind him, untied a grimy sack and rolled out of it the head of an Indian. The hair was long and black and clotted with blood, the eyes were wide open and the lips were drawn back from the white glistening teeth. Altogether it was a most ghastly spectacle of what had been the head of a human being. A bullet had entered under the left ear and had come out through the right temple.

Montgomery took the scalp over to Silver City and tried to collect the reward of \$500 which had been offered by the board of supervisors for the scalp of any hostile Apache. He was unsuccessful as the reward only applied to Grant County, New Mexico, while the Indian had been killed in Arizona. However, the citizens of Silver City took up a collection which netted him \$250 in cash.

Returning to Clifton he sold the scalp to S. W. Pomeroy for \$10.00. Pomeroy sent it to Dan Williamson, state historian, who was then railway agent at Bowie, and Williamson sent it to Miss Carrie Halstead of San Francisco, who had often requested him to send her a scalp if he could possibly obtain one. Frank Barnum took possession of the skull, buried it in the

sand on the river bank and when the flesh had fallen away, cleaned it up and it was afterwards one of the curiosities of the Blue Goose Saloon.

General Miles sent Lieutenant Whipple to Clifton to investigate the killing of this Indian and it was a mooted question as to who fired the first shot. It was decided by a "Kangaroo Court," which heard the matter, that the Indian was at fault and that Montgomery was entirely justified in killing him. The probability is that they met unexpectedly on the trail and that both fired at the same time. At any rate no one can deny that Montgomery had a hand in the making of a "Good Indian," as the phrase was used in those days.