

**"LARAMIE": OR, THE
QUEEN OF
BEDLAM. A STORY OF
THE SIOUX WAR OF 1876**

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CHARLES KING

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STORY OF THE SIOUX WAR OF 1876.

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U.S.A.,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "MARION'S FAITH," "THE DESERTER,"
"FROM THE RANKS," ETC.



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“LARAMIE;”
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I.

THE snow had gone from all the foot-hills and had long since disappeared in the broad river bottom. It was fast going from the neighboring mountains, too—both the streams told plainly of that, for while the Platte rolled along in great, swift surges under the Engineer Bridge, its smaller tributary—the “Larmie,” as the soldiers called it—came brawling and foaming down its stony bed and sweeping around the back of the fort with a wild vehemence that made some of the denizens of the south end decidedly nervous. The rear windows of the commanding officer’s house looked out upon a rushing torrent, and where the surgeon lived, at the south-west angle, the waters lashed against the shabby old board fence that had been built in by-gone days, partly to keep the children and chickens from tumbling into the stream when the water was high, partly to keep out marauding coyotes

(. . .)

when the water was low. South and west the bare, gray-brown slopes shut out the horizon and limited the view. Eastward lay the broad, open valley beyond the confluence of the streams,—bare and level along the crumbling banks, bare and rolling along the line of the foot-hills. Northward the same brown ridges were tumbled up like a mammoth wave a mile or so beyond the river, while between the northern limits of the garrison proper and the banks of the larger stream there lay a level “flat,” patched here and there with underbrush, and streaked by a winding tangle of hoof- and wheel-tracks that crossed and re-crossed each other, yet led, one and all, to the distant bridge that spanned the stream, and thence bore away northward like the tines of a pitchfork, the one to the right going over the hills a three days’ march to the Indian agencies up along the “Wakpa Schicha,” the other leading more to the west around a rugged shoulder of bluff, and then stretching away due north for the head-waters of the Niobrara and the shelter of the jagged flanks of Rawhide Butte. Only in shadowy clusters up and down the stream was there anywhere sign of timber. Foliage, of course, there was none. Cottonwood and willow in favored nooks along the Platte were just beginning to shoot forth their tiny pea-green tendrils in answer to the caressing touch of the May-day sunshine.

April had been a month of storm and bluster and huge, wanton wastes of snow, whirling and drifting down from the bleak range that veiled the valley of the Laramie from the rays of the westering sun; and any one who chose to stroll out from the fort and climb the gentle slope to the bluffs on that side, and to stand by the rude scaffolding whereon were bleaching the bones of some Dakota brave, could easily see the gleaming, glistening sides of the grand old peak, fully forty miles away,—all one sheen of frosty white that still defied the melting rays. Somebody was up there this very afternoon,—two somebodies. Their figures were blacked in silhouette against the sky close by the Indian scaffolding; but even at the distance one could see they were not Indian mourners. That was not a blanket which the tall, slender shape had just thrown about the slighter form. Mrs. Miller, the major's wife, who happened to be crossing the parade at the moment, knew very well that it was an officer's cape, and that Randall McLean had carefully wrapped it about Nellie Bayard lest the keen wind from the west, blowing freely over the ridges, should chill the young girl after her long spin across the prairie and up the heights.

A good-hearted woman was Mrs. Miller, and very much did she like the doctor's sweet and pretty daughter, very much better than she fancied the

doctor himself, although, had she been pressed for a reason for her distrust of the senior medical attendant of the garrison, Mrs. Miller might have found it hard to give satisfactory answer. He was a widower, and "that made him interesting to some people," was her analysis of the situation. She really knew nothing more detrimental to his character, and yet she wished he had not lost his wife, and her wishes on this point were not entirely because of Elinor's motherless state. It was the first year the girl had spent in garrison since the death of that loving mother nearly a decade before. There were not lacking hearts full of sympathy and affection for the weeping little maiden when that sore affliction befell her. She had been taken to her mother's old home, reared and educated, and possibly over-indulged there, and sometimes gladdened by visits from her handsome and distinguished father. A marked man in his profession was Dr. Bayard, one of the "swells" of the medical corps of the army, and rapturously had he been loved by the beautiful and delicate woman whose heart he had won, somewhat to the sorrow of her people. They did not like the army, and liked it still less in the long years of separation that followed. Bayard was a man who in his earlier service had secured many a pleasant detail, and had been a society leader at Old Point Comfort, and New-

port, and Boston Harbor, and now, in his advancing years and under an administration with which he had lost influence, he was taking his turn at frontier service, and heartily damning the fates that had landed him at Laramie. His dead wife's father was a man whose dictum was law in the political party in power. The doctor appealed to him to urge the Secretary of War to revoke the orders which consigned him to the isolation of a Wyoming post, but the old gentleman had heard more than one account of his widowed son-in-law's propensities and peccadilloes. It was his conviction that Newport was not the place for handsome Dr. Bayard; he rather delighted in the news that the doctor promptly sent him; but, though a power in politics, he was in some things no politician, for, when his son-in-law begged him to use his influence in his behalf, the old gentleman said no,—and told him why.

That gloomy November when Dr. Bayard left for the West he took his revenge on the old people, for he took his daughter with him.

It was a cruel, an almost savage blow, and one that was utterly unlooked for. Fond as he had been of Elinor's mother, and proud as he was of his pretty child, the doctor had been content to spend only occasional holidays with her. Every few months he came to visit them, or had her run down to New