



Bloody Williamson



THEY call southern Illinois "Egypt" and Williamson county "Bloody Williamson." The county's sobriquet is clearly due to a series of feuds and killings dating back to 1870 and ending—let us hope—with the massacre of the strip miners in the woods between Marion and Herrin on June 23 last.

Why "Egypt" is not so apparent. Explanations differ according to whether the informant is an Egyptian or not. Some captious outsiders profess to believe that the inhabitants of southern Illinois dwell, or used to dwell, in a state of mental darkness. Others say that as the city on the Ohio river was christened Cairo the hinterland naturally acquired the name Egypt.

Others contend that the region was so dubbed because the flats about Cairo resemble the delta of the Nile, especially in flood time. Cairo was the town lampooned—or was it a veracious picture?—by Dickens in "Martin Chuzzlewit." The residents of Egypt, on the other hand, ascribe the appellation to fertility of soil and fidelity of climate. They recall specifically a strange year when all of northern Illinois was wasted by drought and had to be fed from the bursting granaries of the southern tier. The old settlers knew their Bible. They pointed exultantly to the forty-first chapter of Genesis, the story of Joseph's interpretation of the dream and of his hoarding the corn through the seven years of plenty against the seven of famine.

"And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said, and the dearth was in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands."

Coal Near Surface.

This is a pleasing and plausible explanation of the nickname given to southern Illinois, and one prefers to believe it the true one. The fact is, however, that there are more fertile soils than that of Williamson county. It is clayey and alkaline, and has been largely abandoned by the wheat grower, which must not be taken to mean that the country is not green and beautiful at this season, for it is. But many years ago the farmers discovered that they had beneath their feet a treasure surpassing the bumperest of corn and wheat crops—a vein of bituminous coal underlying most of the region, averaging nine feet in thickness, stretching well across the state and easily mined. In some parts of Williamson county the coal is only 10 or 12 feet beneath the surface. In such places are the strip mines, so called because the surface dirt is stripped off and the coal taken out as from an open quarry instead of being reached by tunneling, as in coal fields where the vein lies deep. In other parts of the same county the coal is from 100 to 200 feet under ground.

When the farmers realized that they owned black diamond mines many of them sold out or leased to the mining companies and retired to the towns. Others continue to cultivate their farms and lease the coal rights to outsiders, and there are some who work their farms in the summer and mine in the winter. Williamson and its neighbor, Franklin county, are two of the nation's greatest coal producers. With the exploitation of the coal fields came a boom. Herrin, a few miles from the scene of the recent massacre, was until 25 years ago a wheat field, a part of what the settlers called Herrin's Prairie. Even 20 years ago its railroad station was a boxcar. Now it is a city of about 12,000 inhabitants, with good buildings and streets, the only hospital in Williamson county and a high school which any person encountered in Herrin will tell you is "the best in the state." Marion, the county seat, nine miles from Herrin, an older and sedate community, has about 10,000 persons. Carbondale has a state normal school.

Mountaineers Come In.

The principal source of early migration was the mountaineers of Tennessee and Kentucky. A good many of the pioneers crossed the Ohio just before the civil war because they were unionists. They found copperheads in their new abode, and the mingling led to famous feuds. At the beginning of the war Williamson county was democratic, but before the war ended it swung to republicanism, and there it has stayed ever since.

The people are still distinctively southern in their speech, habits and cooking. It is not strange that they should be, considering their origin and the fact that Marion and Herrin, Ill. are farther south than Louisville, Ky., and about on a line with Richmond, Va. If the reader will glance at a map he will see this to be true. One notices few negroes, however. There have been so many "race riots" in southern Illinois, caused usually by the importation of negro labor from the south and the resistance of white northern labor that the southern counties have not been regarded as especially salubrious retreats for the colored brother. There are, however, a few mines that employ negroes, and as a rule they get along with the whites.

The white settlers came from a region of feudal tradition and practice and of self-made law. When they crossed the river some of them kept on shooting when aggrieved, and it is taking some time for their descendants to get into the habit of carrying their troubles to court instead of acting as their own judge and executioner. In the roaring boom days of Herrin the killings, the writer was told, averaged almost one a day, and anything less than this was regarded as a symptom of sluggishness. But the city is not so tolerant toward crime as it used to be. The whole county is gradually inclining toward peace, despite the occasional outbreaks of ferocity, but even so the busiest man in the Williamson county continues to be the veteran coroner, William McCown. On the whole, it was a hopeful sign when the mobs of June 21 had to loot hardware



The feudists always fire from ambush upon their unsuspecting victims.

stores to get arms and ammunition. Time was when nobody needed to do that.

History of the Vendetta.

Far away and long ago is the procession of murders known locally as the "vendetta," which caused Williamson county to be tagged with the adjective "bloody." But a brief outline of this dark feud may help the reader to an understanding of the massacre of the miners in 1922. The facts were painstakingly collected by Milo Erwin, an attorney of Marion, and published in 1876 when the graves were fresh. Historians owe a debt to Hal W. Trevillion, editor of the Herrin News, who republished the volume in 1914.

"I have to catalogue the deeds of the vendetta, concocted by leaders and executed by fiendish emissaries, that has not a parallel in the record of crime," Mr. Erwin wrote. "Here were men at whose bloodthirstiness even savages would blush, which brands them forever as the babes and bloodiest of incarnate demons."

Several families were suspected of being concerned in the vendetta, among them the Russells, the Siseys, the Hendersons, the Bulliners, the Hinchcliffs and the Crains. The original causes were

a deck of cards, a woman and a crop of oats. The Russells, Siseys and Hendersons were republicans, the other democrats. Felix, or "Field" Henderson, fought George Bulliner over a game of cards in a saloon on July 4, 1868, and was badly beaten by the Bulliners. The next autumn somebody burned the Bulliners' cotton gin and three ricks of hay. Some persons thought Field Henderson did it.

In 1869 David Bulliner and George Siney fell out over the ownership of a crop of oats and George knocked David down with a shovel. The Bulliners retaliated with Henry rifles and pistols, and Siney was shot in the hip while trying to get behind a tree. In 1872 Thomas J. Russell and John Bulliner courted Miss Sarah Stocks. She preferred Bulliner and thereafter he and Russell were enemies. The vendetta was now under way. Other families were dragged in. The Crains, falling out with the Hendersons, became allies of the Bulliners. It got so that whenever members of the embattled families met there was a fight.

From fists they proceeded to deadlier weapons and to the ambushade. One morning in 1873, George Bulliner, riding his horse along the country road toward Carbondale, was shot from the brush, and

all he said thereafter was "Turn me over and let me die." Two assassins, from fence corners, fired at Monroe and David Bulliner with shot guns and revolvers while they were on their way from church. The Bulliners returned the fire. David was shot in the back and mortally wounded.

As Set Down in History.

"This," wrote Mr. Edwin, chronicler of the feud, "was the worst murder of them all. You may combine corruption, debauchery, and all the forms of degradation known to the inventive genius of man, and cord them together with the strings drawn from maidens' hearts, and paint the scene in human blood bespangled with broken vows and seared consciences, and still it will redden heaven with revengeful blush and leave blacken hell to make it equal." Before he died David Bulliner accused Thomas Russell and David Pleasant, Russell was tried and acquitted, although John Bulliner sat in the courtroom facing him with his gun. One of the witnesses was Sarah Stocks, over whom Russell and John Bulliner had quarreled. Mr. Erwin's picture of her must not be omitted. "Her contour," he said, "is not as faultless as a Greek goddess, but her

form and features had caught some new grace from the times. Her eye was as clear and cold as a stalactite of Capri. She wore a sigh, and there is something in a sigh for everybody. But I will throw no shadow over her, for life in her is as mysterious as in the rich belle; and when the golden chariot of destiny rolls through the skies she may take her seat among the great."

Tom Russell's release so enraged the Bulliners and their friends that there was talk of hanging the leaders of the Russell-Henderson clan. As Tom Russell disappeared, vengeance was visited on his kin and fellow feudists. On May 15, 1874, three men hid behind a pile of logs and shot James Henderson while he was working in his field. They had tried to steal up to his house, but the barking of his dogs and braying of his mules scared them away. Henderson died; his wife went mad. Henderson on his deathbed said the assassins were James Norris, John Bulliner and Manuel or Monroe Bulliner. John Bulliner was arrested. He was acquitted because four witnesses from Tennessee swore he was in that state at the time of the murder.

In all the narrative there is not one man-to-man duel. The feudists fired al-

ways from ambush—from weeds, roadside thickets, barnyard fence corners, from behind trees and logs, upon unsuspecting victims. Vincent Hinchcliff was riding homeward after visiting a sick man. Several men, hiding in a skirt of timber, fired four shotguns and twelve times with pistols. "Vince" and his horse fell dead.

Another Offered Up.

"And in the woods nearby," wrote Mr. Erwin, "were heard the screams of joy and fiendish yells of these ruffians, holding a regular kickapoo war dance over his remains, while the smoke from their guns was ascending high up in the dome of day as a signal to the surrounding country that another victim had been offered up."

"Field" Henderson was charged with the murder of Hinchcliff, but 15 men swore at the trial that they had seen him at a church 13 miles distant at the time Hinchcliff was killed. The state's attorney, J. D. F. Jennings, dropped the case. Jennings, afterward judge of probate in Oklahoma City, was the father of Al Jennings, ex-bandit, whom President Roosevelt pardoned and who later ran for governor of Oklahoma. It will be recalled that Al Jennings, following the traditional custom of demanding blood for blood, was hunting outlaws who had killed his brother when he got entangled with them and became an outlaw himself.

Usually the Williamson county bloods did their own murdering, but occasionally, it appears from Mr. Erwin's story, they hired it done. Marshall Crain said that John Bulliner agreed to give him \$300 for killing George W. Siney, and did give him all but 25 of the sum. Siney had been waylaid four times, but seemed to have a charmed life. On a night of rain and wind Crain crept along Siney's porch in Carbondale, found an open window where the curtains were blowing, aimed his shotgun between the curtains and fired. As the historian of the vendetta says:

"Marshall Crain pulled the trigger, and George W. Siney laid still in death's eternal sleep."

Party Lines Are Broken.

Crain next sought out William Spence, who kept a store in Crainville, fired both barrels of his shotgun into Spence's abdomen and finished him with a revolver. At this point the patience of the bystanders broke. Republicans joined with democrats in the common cause of ending the slaughter. They were influenced by practical as well as moral considerations. We quote Mr. Erwin again:

"Our lands went down in value one-third to one-half. The fields of grain that were annually gathered on the west side of the county nearly failed. These were stubborn facts, known at home and read by thinking minds throughout the world. The name of Williamson county had become a hiss and a byword. Strangers shunned us like a serpent, and the sting was felt. Affairs were deplorable. Ruffianism was rampant. Noted assassins were concealed in the thickets of the bloody ground. The air was filled with the omens of disaster. Pass the street corners and the breath of murder was whispered in your face. Bold assassins stalked unbridled and unchecked. To bring these outlaws to justice was the universal desire of our people; but how to do it was a point that put to silence the entire county. The people were cursing the officers. Those who knew anything were afraid to tell it."

County and state officers offered rewards for the arrest and conviction of the murderers. A woman told who they were. Brave men plucked out the evidence. Sam Music, a teamster, was arrested. In jail he confessed to complicity in the killing of Spence and Siney, and implicated others. All, to their amazement, were arrested and went to trial. Marshall Crain was sentenced to be hanged. George W. Siney Jr. visited his cell, and Marshall said: "Wash, I am ruined. I murdered your father, and ask you to forgive me." "Wash said," Mr. Erwin reports, "'You murdered him without cause, and I will never forgive you,' and walked away with the excitement of gratified vanity lighting with radiance on the vestal roses of his cheek."

A Poem on Scaffold.

The hanging of Marshall Crain was a great event in Illinois and was regarded as proof that "bloody Williamson" had turned over a new leaf. On the scaffold he said: "I am guilty of killing the two men," and read a poem of 24 verses which he had composed for the occasion. Sam Music was sent to prison for 14 years and some of the others for longer terms.

One would like to report that Williamson county, after this purging, lived happily ever after. Mr. Erwin, closing his narrative, prayed that it might be so. He wrote: "With this, I seal the volume, and turn my eyes away from the bloody acts of depraved men, hoping with all the fervor of which my soul is capable that God will add no other plague to our county." And in the introduction to his history he offered this excellent advice: "There is no reason why a community of as intelligent, honest and industrious a people as ours should not live in peace and plenty. We must learn to denounce crime and punish criminals, and not stand ready to applaud them. Our criminals must lay down their arms, for there can never be peace as long as they sleep on them. The law must be enforced; without this, life will be unsafe and property invaded. Young men, help build up a healthy public sentiment against crime."

That was written 46 years ago. The county has indeed had its periods of calm since then, but on June 21 and 22, 1922, 21 men were killed in and following an attack by union miners on workers in a strip mine that was being operated in defiance of the union. Nineteen of them were killed after they had surrendered and marched out behind a white flag. They were marched to a wire fence in the woods. "Run, you scabs!" the leader said, and as they ran they were shot, and some who escaped after running this double gauntlet of guns and barbed wire were hunted through swamp and thicket and dragged out and killed.

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lently that his head jerked backward. She spoke in his ear; but I heard.

"I suppose when you've made him hole out you're going to kill him—as you did that man in Texas—you murderer!" she said. Gillespie had been holding the golf bag loosely by the handle. His fingers seemed to go limp; the clubs clattered on the green. At this sound I saw a nervous jerk or so from the heads of the gallery beyond the ropes; then all eyes went back to Mr. Moore. I realized that the presence of Madge and me inside the ropes was attracting no attention; we were policing the course and had that privilege. All this in the instant while Madge Bavin drew her breath to add:

"Stay just where you are, Professor Hansen. If you make one move or say one word I'll tell your record to the crowd—give your whole game away!"

The jaw of John B. Gillespie went slack, his complexion turned green. I saw that he was paralyzed, silenced and needed no further present attention. I turned, and so did Madge Bavin, toward Edgerley Moore. He had been standing like a statue over his Schenectady putter, and you could hear the breathing of the gallery as they waited for him to make that one easy stroke which meant victory. But now he raised up a little and turned his head uncertainly in our direction with the look of an old dog who is expecting his master's call. The motion released the tension of the crowd; a faint buzz of whispers broke out. And Madge Bavin strolled past Mr. Moore with the casual air of an official who is seeing that all is well. As she passed she spoke. Her voice, I suppose, was lower than when she addressed Gillespie—it could not have carried to the crowd behind the ropes. Yet at the moment it

seemed to me that the whole town must hear it. Even, monotonous—yet how it rang!

"Drive it over the bulletin board there," she said. "Drive it as far as you can!"

Mr. Moore straightened his shoulders; I saw the wooden head of his putter come up with a perfect, slow back swing; saw it sweep down, saw a divot spring from the surface of the green. The ball soared over the bulletin board, over the driveway—was lost to view. It landed, I learned later, in the brook a good 140 yards away. The fixed eyes of the gaping gallery followed the ball. Before they looked back Mrs. Bavin had spoken again to Mr. Moore:

"You will sit down. You will go to sleep—but you can still walk." By the time the gallery turned back its gaze to the enactor of this remarkable performance, Mr. Moore had sunk down on the green with something of the motion of a baby who is learning to walk, and his eyes slowly closed. Then babel broke out; people began to come through the ropes; but Mrs. Bavin, leaning over Edgerley Moore, cried—in her natural tone now:

"Give him air! Send Dr. Carrington here!" Almost as soon as she spoke the doctor was at her side.

"He can walk, doctor—get him to the clubhouse," she said—and then, in Moore's ear: "Get up when the doctor helps you. Go with him!" Moore, the doctor supporting him, struggled to his feet. His eyes were still closed. "Mr. Gillespie—help on the other side," she whispered out—"and, Jimmie"—this in an aside to me—"keep them off—but join us inside." All the way I fought a desperate rear-guard action with the press and the gamblers. I succeeded some-

how; when I arrived at the bedroom to which they had taken Mr. Moore I saw that someone—either Gillespie or Mrs. Bavin—had awakened him from his trance. He lay on the bed looking bewildered but normal. And no sooner had I slammed and locked the door than Mrs. Bavin turned to John B. Gillespie.

"You have 24 hours to leave this town—and take your addition with you—"

she began. The rest was splendid—but what with my anxiety lest the reporters clamoring in the hall break in on us, what with my general emotional upheaval, only flashes stick in my memory. Like: "The full story of that Texas episode—I've been working with Dr. King, I tell you—a subject in the third stage of hypnosis will take suggestions from anyone—I did it publicly so that I'd have the proof in case you should try one single trick on me—you're to say to the reporters that this is a nervous collapse—I'll give the full story to the newspapers—that's all, Mr. Gillespie—go and don't come back!"

I remember the face of Gillespie—pale, the lines fallen, the power gone from his eyes. I remember that he babbled out a futile word of denial or protest here and there, which Mrs. Bavin stopped instantly with her own steely tones. At this final command she turned to me. And I, moving as though myself hypnotized, unlocked the door, somehow jammed the unresisting Gillespie into a cranny of the crowd of questioning reporters, dammed the flood by main force, and locked the door again.

Madge Bavin turned to Edgerley Moore. "Now," she said, with all the mother of her in her tone, "we'll take care of your case. Don't worry. We're going to get

you out of this so that no one will ever suspect."

Madge Bavin carried the operation through to the end; however, the next week was a period of strain, not only for her, but for Carrington and me, her committed on suppression. We got Mr. Moore to Carrington's private hospital under charge of a head nurse who is officially deaf, dumb and blind. The doctor and I were always on guard, and we managed to put over our story to the press—that the strain of the tournament season had been too much for a man of Edgerley Moore's advanced years; that a sudden mental aberration made him drive on the last green instead of putting, and then collapse.

But the news of Mr. Gillespie's failure and disappearance drew the attention of the newspapers momentarily away from Mr. Moore and gave us our opening. That night we motored our patient down to New York and put him on a steamer for England. He never came back.

Dr. Carrington was in London the next year and ran across him in New Oxford street. Dr. Carrington took him to luncheon and, following an almost irresistible impulse, turned the conversation indelicately toward Mr. Moore's career at golf.

The doctor said afterward that he felt a little conscience-stricken when he did this; but he certainly paid high. The disagreeable episode which closed his career as champion had evaporated from Mr. Moore's mind; he remembered only his glories. He held Dr. Carrington until nearly 4 o'clock while he dined out the full details of every round he had played. As a device for breaking away Dr. Carrington dragged in a reference to Gillespie and the climax of the last match. At that Mr. Moore's eyes flickered and his expression grew for a moment sheepish. But he recovered almost instantly.

"Well, anyhow," he cackled, "this old dog had his day."
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