

The Dark and Bloody Ground

A History of Kentucky

By

SAMUEL D. OSBORN



Press of The King Printing Co.
Bristol, Tenn.-Va.
1907

Copyrighted 1907
by
Samuel D. Osborn

The Dark and Bloody Ground

Kentucky is 473 miles long, 170 miles wide, and nobody knows how thick. A man living on Beaver Creek in Floyd County dug a well 39 feet deep and reported that it was Kentucky as far down as he went. Some mathematicians calculate that it goes the whole way down. I would suggest that it goes at least half way down to the bottomless pit.

Kentucky is composed of rocks, dirt, stick-weeds and dog-fennel on the outside, and roots, coal, red-worms and dead people on the inside. Outsiders sometimes get the impression that Kentucky is inhabited by people, but a greater mistake was never made. The population of Kentucky consists of scraps, pieces, vagrants, dead-beats, loafers, has-beens and might-bes.

Kentucky has been called the "Dark and Bloody Ground," and in the eastern part, where I live, she is true to her ancient tradition. The inhabitants of this section are peculiar beings. They drink blood for coffee and use human brains for cream; dynamite for butter and gun-powder for pepper; there is one thing they hate, yea two things they cannot endure: they won't tell the truth and they won't be called a liar. I am from Kentucky myself, and I am lieing right now, which is the reason I know this.

The chief occupations in eastern Kentucky are chewing tobacco, whittling, advising their neighbors what to do, and informing each other what they would do if they were in some other man's place. They also swap horses sometimes, and will do you right, but they reserve the right of judging what is right. I swapped horses with a man there and he assured me that the horse was younger than he had been four years ago. I had just stated that I would trade provided that the horse was young. To have refused to trade with him would have been disputing his word, so I traded with him and found out afterward that the horse was older than he had ever been in his life.

Kentucky is noted for fast horses, pretty women, strong tobacco and whiskey. I remember once of a man having a horse that could not be beaten and there came along another man with a horse that could beat anything. They got to disputing about the horses and

flew at each other's throats and for a time there was much danger that one of the horses would be ownerless, but the horse was saved this great bereavement by a scientific man who happened to be present. He suggested that the encounter between the men would only settle which of them was the stronger and would leave the great horse problem for future generations to solve. He also pointed out a way to settled the question, which was for the horses to run one mile and the one that could run it the quickest should be winner. They ran the mile, and both men claimed the victory. They had begun to dismount and carry it to the Court of Appeals, when the shadows of the horses came rushing up, killing both horses and both men, instantly.

And when it comes to pretty women, Kentucky is strictly there. I stopped to stay all night at a place in Kentucky and there came in the prettiest woman that ever was born. This affected me very strangely. For instance: when I shut my eyes, I could not see a wink. Then I could open them and see to pick up a pin. She had not been in the room but a short time until there came in another woman, and she was the prettiest thing that ever lived. Another strange sensation came over me. I felt that I was right there and no place else, my heart began to beat, and I felt as if I were alive. I had not recovered from my astonishment till another woman entered, and she was the prettiest thing that ever lived or died. The light of heaven beamed from her tender eyes. Her soul was a love center, and love brooded in the air, and danced in the sunlight for twenty feet around wherever she went. She spoke, and her voice was as beautiful as a chime of bells, as tender as the purr of a kitten, as kind as the sunshine of May. My feelings were rent and torn and flung in every direction. I saw torrents sweeping down the sides of mountains. I saw monster trees torn from the earth by mighty winds and hurled into the sky. I saw giants leaping from peak to peak of the mountain tops. I saw earthquakes shaking cities into tangled heaps, and I saw the sky painted into one rainbow and it was sometime before I could realize that I was still on earth. But time moved on and the days and nights marched by in a frantic race for the goal of death and that face and voice are only a memory now.

And strong tobacco! I knew of a sawlogger once that could take a chew of home-made tobacco and lift his best or two chews and lift his very best. Kentucky tobacco is good for the eyesight. I once

took a chew from a twist belonging to a neighbor of mine, and immediately I could see two things where there was only one. I could see also that I was a fool, and although I could not see inside my stomach as I can with my X-Ray, still I believed the tobacco to be equal to the X-Ray, for I could see what had been inside my stomach a short time previous.

Another benefit which tobacco confers on the human race is furnishing a subject for conversation. The inhabitants of Kentucky never say "Good Morning," or "How do you do?" but "Have you got any good tobacco?" Every man would rather chew his neighbor's tobacco than his own, because there comes a rainy day at the end of every dry spell, and he wants his own for that. But a great many men, rather than do without, would buy their own tobacco. I have heard a great many men say that they would rather live on three meals per day and their tobacco than to eat six meals and have no tobacco.

But after all, the chief glory of Kentucky is her strong whiskey. Some of it is so strong that a small quantity will turn men into hogs and cattle. It is so strong that it will overcome the laws of gravitation. I drank a bottle one time, and if it had not been for a wheat field would have fallen upward into the sky, would have been carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, as it were. As it was, I pulled up an acre and a half of fine wheat trying to hold down.

I saw a man once who could drink a small bottle of whiskey and curse with the eloquence of a Daniel Webster, curse till the air turned blue for ten feet all around him.

I never advised but one man to drink whiskey. He was talking about drinking and stated that he could drink a quart and know everything. I advised him to get a quart and drink it at once, for he did not know much as it was, and that was cheaper than going to school. By drinking we know that the world revolves, for we can feel it revolve, and can hardly keep up with it. I got behind once while drinking, and if I had not lodged against the side of a mountain, there is no telling what would have become of me.

Kentucky was first settled in 1774 and has been unsettled ever since. I know of several things in this section which are unsettled, such as feuds and board bills. The Indian lived in Kentucky long before 1774, but somehow or other he could not settle it. But this is not to be much wondered at, when you consider that they had only

bows and arrows, for we all know that it takes gunpowder to settle a thing right. White of egg may be alright for settling coffee, but when it comes to settling a State, give me gunpowder, or give me death. After the white men had sacrificed much time and ammunition in order to settle Kentucky, the ungrateful Indians would unsettle it every time they turned their backs. The patience of the white men was severely tried and it is almost a miracle that their love for the Indian did not grow cold, but they trusted in a kind Providence and said one to another "We will send the Indian on where the Lord can deal with him personally. He knows more about them than we do." So they carried out this plan, but strange to relate, the Indians would not go unless accompanied by some of the white men. This made the rest of the people lonesome and unhappy. But Love gained the victory, as it always does in the Indian wars, and they loaded their guns and made ready for the next attack.

On one occasion, while the Indians were holding a council, the feelings of all were voiced by the mighty words of the great chief, Boot-Jack. He arose and addressed them thus: "Warriors, Kentucky don't need settling. Kentucky is full up, and we have bears, panthers, snakes and frogs. Kentucky is full up; we have no room for the white man, unless it is under the ground. Kentucky belongs to the Indian. Only last night our prophet, Smoke Vine, turned himself around and around until his head swam and he could see the Great Spirit, who told him that Kentucky belonged to the Indian. The white men are no good. This very morning I received a telegram that they were chopping down the trees a few miles from here. The white man is no good. I propose that we go at once to their settlement, borrow their guns and kill the last man of them. We must use the white man's weapons. We already have a quart of gunpowder which young chief Grab-Quick has stolen. We must sow it and raise a crop as soon as possible. We must learn how to make the noise that kills." In the battle after this many of the Indians went to the Happy Hunting Grounds, and many of the white men went where they could play harps, sing songs, wave palm leaves, and rest.

The white man believed that no one could own land unless he was white, and if a white man let his face go dirty for a short time, he was counted out. As a result of this, the inhabitants soon formed a habit of washing once every week. This custom is followed by their

posterity, except in the winter time when they are prevented by bad weather.

And this is how it happened that Kentucky was settled by white people, i. e., white on the outside. And generation has succeeded generation. The past is all gone and we have nothing left but the present. In the meantime Kentucky has produced some very great men. For instance, Tom Hoover, inventor of the Hoover Box for catching rabbits. He also was a great trader. On one occasion, after having bought a bushel of corn on a credit, he told the seller that if he would carry his corn to the top of the hill, he would tell him how to prevent the muskrats from eating his corn. The corn was carried to the hilltop, and Mr. Hoover told him to bring the muskrats to the same hilltop, and cut their heads off and throw them on one side and their bodies on the other. The heads could not eat the corn for the lack of some place to put it, and the bodies could not for the lack of something to chew it. Upon one occasion, while in the city, he was passing a Jew store, when the Jew cried out, "Come in. We are selling goods at half price today." Mr. Hoover entered and asked for tobacco. The Jew threw a piece on to the counter and said the price was ten cents. Mr. Hoover picked up the tobacco, threw down a nickel, and started to go, when the Jew cried out, "That piece of tobacco is ten cents. "True enough, that is the price," said Mr. Hoover, "but as you are selling at half price, I gave you a nickel, which, according to my arithmetic, is half of a dime." After leaving the store, Mr. Hoover was accosted by a well-dressed, oily-tongued man, who asked him if he had not "seen him somewhere." "Perhaps you have," replied Mr. Hoover, for I have been somewhere. "But your face," rejoined the oily man, "appears familiar." "It ought to," replied Mr. Hoover, "for I have been carrying it around for the last fifty years." "But," continued the man, "you are not related to the Smiths, of Smithville?" "No Sir," answered Mr. Hoover, "I ain't akin to anybody, except when I run for office. My own father and mother are rank strangers to me now." "Well," said the stranger, "I think I know you." "No," said Mr. Hoover, "You don't know me, but you will if you don't move on and tend to your own business."

Mr. Hoover stayed at a hotel one night, and during the night he crammed the feather bed betwixt the weather boarding and the ceiling. Next morning, he informed the landlord that he had no

money. "Why didn't you tell me last night," said the landlord. "I hated bad enough to tell you this morning." "But," continued the landlord, "I cannot run business without money." "Well," answered Mr. Hoover, "why don't you get out, and let some one in that can?" About a year after this Mr. Hoover was staying at the same hotel. They had just found the feather bed and the landlord asked Mr. Hoover why he hid it. He answered: I tried to use it for a pillow. 'It was too small for that, and I was afraid I would get it in my ear.'

Mr. Hoover raised some wonderful children. One of them--Charlie--was heard to remark at the postoffice one day that he was the "best hand to hoe corn in the world, but that his brother Taylor could hoe three rows to his one." These boys made more swapping knives with each other than ordinary folks could at hard work. One day Charlie went to the store and called for a nickel's worth of tobacco. The clerk handed it to him. He took it, but did not pay for it. But as he kept staying around, the clerk had a suspicion that he would. Finally he said he did not want the tobacco, and would take candy instead. The clerk made the exchange, and Charlie started to go. "Hold on," shouted the clerk, "you haven't paid for that candy." "Yes I did," said Charlie, "I gave you the tobacco for the candy." "But," said the clerk, "you did not pay for the tobacco." "Why," returned the boy, "I don't want the tobacco. I gave it back."



My name is Samuel Osborn; I live among the hills
Where grow the trees and flowers, where run the brooks and rills;
Where Nature in her freshness, bids all unto a feast;
That feast where all share equal, from the greatest to the least;
Where color, form, and melody are ever a delight;
Where birds make music all the day, and toad-frogs all the night.

I'm a poet, I'm a poet,
And I want the world to know it;
I'll pull and push, and jerk and slam,
Till everybody says I am.

THE STORY OF DANIEL BOONE

The world has produced some notorious hunters—as many perhaps, as any other place, but none other that can compare with Daniel Boone, of Kentucky. He went hunting upon one occasion and had only one bullet. He had not gone far into the woods until he discovered two deer not far apart. He pondered a short time as to how to proceed. Then he drew a bead on one of them, pulled the trigger, and jerked the gun around toward the other and killed them both. After the gun fired, he heard a noise just across the point, and on going over, he discovered that another one had got frightened at the noise and butted its brains out against a tree. He traveled on a short distance and found where the bullet had struck a limb on which twelve pigeons were sitting. It had split the limb and caught all twelve of the pigeons by the toes. He journeyed on and soon found where the bullet had struck a tree. It was a bee-tree. The honey was just pouring out. He reached back behind him to get some mud to stop the hole and caught a rabbit by the leg. There was a creek close by which Boone had to wade. He waded it with his boots on, and after reaching the other shore he heard something braying like a jack. He reached down in his right boot and drew out a fine jack fish. He went a few steps further, and heard something meowing like a cat. He reached down in his left boot, and drew out a large catfish. By some means or other the fish had fallen into the creek, and his timely arrival had saved them from a watery grave.

A short time after this Boone saw a bear standing by the side of a tree. The bear was inert, as if waiting for the moon to change. Before resuming business, Boone's hand instinctively went to his pocket to find something with which to load his gun, and finding a ten penny nail, he proceeded to load the gun with the nail for a bullet. Then he pulled in at the bear. The nail struck the bears tail, and drove it up in the tree. The bear then decided to continue his travels, but since he was going to cut out that territory in the future, he did not like to leave his tail, especially as his body was connected with it, and he would necessarily have to leave it, too. While the bear was considering these things, Boone grabbed a club, rushed up and began beating him. Pretty soon he had his hide beaten loose all over him. Then he struck him another blow and busted a hole in his hide. The bear saw his opportunity, leaped out at this hole, and disappeared. Boone lost the hide before he got home, but if you want proof, the

nail can be found at any hardware store. In order to get on more intimate terms with the bear, Boone had taken off his sheep-skin coat and when the bear escaped, he ran into it, carrying it away with him. One year after this, Boone again met the bear. He was wearing one of the finest fleeces of wool that ever grew. But that is another story. Boone now decided that he had been out long enough, and started home. He had not gone far till he saw a bear in a tall tree. The bear had been watching him all morning. Boone's gun was empty, but he decided to see how the bear would look through the sites. The bear saw his movements, and yelled out: "Don't shoot. I'll surrender. Boone then returned to his cabin, well pleased with his day's work.



MERCHANT'S ADVERTISEMENT

What is the use to sow and reap ;
If you don't try to buy goods cheap?
What is the use to strive and toil?
What is the use to till the soil?
'T is all in vain, so I'm afraid,
If you're not careful where you trade.
I'll sell you goods as cheap as dirt,
A pair of pants, a hat or shirt,
And calico that will not fade,
The best suspenders ever made,
And shoes and socks that will do to wear
At home, at church, or anywhere.
And now, dear friends, come one and all,
Come in the spring, come in the fall ;
Come when the sun is blazing hot ;
Come when the grass and flowers are not ;
And rest assured I'll do you right ;
If we can't trade, we will not fight.

DESOLATION

My sweet heart is going away ;
I cannot endure to live more ;
She's going to Texas, they say,
My troubles will never be o'er.
Great Father above, I implore you to keep her from every harm
And when great icy winds roar, that you will stretch out your great arm,
And hold back the senseless, rash winds
That dare kiss her delicate cheek
When people with hearts and with minds
Are awed by her gaze and are weak,
Oh ! Where on the earth can I seek
For solace, for comfort, for joy ?
And what magic words can I speak
That will bring back the heart of a boy.
Oh ! What shall I do with myself ?
My mind upon her ever dwells,
She's a fairy, an angel, an elf,
A witch, and I'm caught in her spells.
A word or an act never tells
All the storm and the stress of the soul,
Of sorrow that surges and swells,
Of the great waves that over us roll.

REPLY TO A DUN

Mr. First National Bank,
Prestonsburg, Ky.

Dear Sir:—

Your kind letter of recent date received, and I hasten to reply. This letter leaves me enjoying pretty bad health and I hope it will find you the same. How nice it must be to be a bank with ribs of hammered steel, with bowels of gold and silver, with a soul of little pieces of nothing. I believe you hinted that I owed Butler Bros. \$28.00. How like you that is! That's you all over from head to foot! Always thinking of the material things of this world. But come to think of it, matter is just as important as spirit, for if we had not the casket, how could we preserve the diamond. And were it possible for the naked soul of man to go out battling against the fierce and frantic storms of life, who could tell what would happen?

From my earliest youth it has been my custom to pay all debts one time, and if you expect more than this I shall have to say that I am too old to change my ways. I paid this by check one time and there is only one way I would pay it the second time. If Mr. Butler will come to me in person and be properly recognized, I will pay it, otherwise I cannot consider it. Tell him this and also tell him that I would come to Chicago, but this is the time of year for digging May apple root, and if I miss it the opportunity is gone forever.

LETTER

My Dear Girl:—

I thought to do you good, but it seems that circumstances have changed that good into evil. And when I saw the trend of affairs, I thought the least evil would be to call a halt. I have decided to launch my ship into a shoreless sea, knowing that the time will come in the future, as it has in the past, when I shall long for love and find it not; when there will be a famine in the land, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but a dearth of woman's love. But my soul is iron. I have learned to endure all things. And when the storms of desolation beat upon my head, I shall stand erect and brave their fury without a tremor and without a groan. I trust that your feelings are not hurt. If I thought that your feelings were seriously affected, I would be tempted to go out into the woods and disfigure myself. Somehow my good looks were never anything but a curse to me anyway.

My dearest love, we can never wed,
It matters not what we have said;
It matters not what we feel,
Our hearts may be as true as steel,
Our love may be as strong as death
And we may sigh with every breath,
But whether you be near or far
Betwixt us two there is a bar—
A bar that never can be crossed,
A sea that's ever tempest-tossed.
They tell us love can never die,
That it will live beyond the sky;
Then let us hope in spite of all—
Of Jesus' death or Adam's fall—
That in that land of bliss above
That we can drink our fill of love.

THE FLIGHT OF TIME

(Written when a boy)

One night while I was out alone
My memory rolled back to when I was a little boy
And did discretion lack.
I thought Oh! a thousand things
That I had loved while young.
I thought of games that I had played
And songs that I had sung.
I thought of boys who now are dead
With whom I used to play
And tears came rushing to my eyes
To think they'd passed away.
They died, they left this mundane sphere,
And went to parts unknown
But sometimes when my heart is sad,
I seem to hear them moan.
I sit and sadly ask myself
Which state of man is best—
To be alive upon the earth
Or in the grave at rest.
Oh, friends it is a solemn thing
That time moves ever on.
We never know ourselves aright till earthly life is gone.