

## Literature, &amp; c.

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A STORY OF TEXAS BORDER  
LIFE.

By C. Wilkins Eimi.

## THE SHOT IN THE EYE.

Continued from our last.

One day we had all turned out for a deer drive. This hunt, in which dogs are used for driving the game out of the timber, scatters the hunters very much; they are stationed at the different "stands," which are sometimes miles apart, to watch for the deer passing out; for this reason the party seldom gets together again until night. We divided in the morning, and skirted up opposite sides of a wide belt of bottom timber, while the drivers and dogs penetrated it, to rouse the deer, which ran out on either side by the stands, which were known to the hunters. We were unusually successful, and returned to a late dinner at our host's, the planter's house. By dusk all had come in, except my friend, whose name was Henry, and a man named Stoner, one of the neighbours, who had joined our hunt. Dinner was ready, and we sat down to it, supposing they would be in, in a few moments. The meal was nearly over, when Henry, who was a gay, voluble fellow, came bustling into the room, with a slightly flurried manner, addressed our host—"Squire, this is a strange country of yours! Do you let crazy people range it with guns in their hands?"

"Not when we know it. Why? What about crazy people? You look excited?"

"Well, I think I've had enough to make me feel a little curious."

"What is it? What is it?" exclaimed everybody eagerly.

"Why, I have met with either the old Harry himself—a ghost—or a madman;—and which it is, I'm confoundedly puzzled to tell."

"Where? How?"

He threw himself into a chair, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and continued; "You know, Stoner and myself, when we parted from you all this morning, took up the right hand side of the poor timber. Well, Stoner accompanied me to my stand, where we parted; he to go on to his; and I have seen nothing of him since. Soon after he left me, a deer passed out—I shot at it—wounded it—and jumped on my horse to pursue it. The deer had staggered at my fire, but it was not so badly wounded as I supposed, and led me off, until it suddenly occurred to me I might get lost, and I reigned up; but I soon found that this sober second thought had come too late, and that I was already out of my latitude. I wandered about nearly all day, though taking care not to go very far in any direction, before I came across anything which promised to set me right again. I at last came upon a wagon trail, and felt relieved, for I knew it must take me to some point where I could get information. The trail was narrow, leading through scrubby thickets; and I was riding along slowly, looking down, in the hope of detecting the tracks of some of your horses, when the violent shying of my horse caused me to raise my eyes. And, by George! it was enough to have "stampeded" a regiment of horse! On the left of the trail stood a very tall, skeleton-like figure, dressed in skins; one foot advanced, as if he had stopped in the act of stepping across it, and a long heavy gun, just swinging down to the level, bearing on me. Of course my heart leaped into my throat, and my flesh shrank and crept. Before I could think of raising my gun, my eyes met those of this strange figure; and such eyes. Surprise at their cold, unnatural expression, suspended my action; burning with a chill, singular brilliancy, in deep-sunken sockets, they looked as if they never had winked. Dwelling steadily upon my face for a moment, they seemed to be satisfied, and the gun was slowly thrown back upon his shoulders; and plucking at a long grisly beard, with an impatient gesture of his bony hand, the figure made a stride across the trail, and without speaking a word plunged into the thicket. I was so confounded by this curious dumb show, that he was nearly concealed in the brush before I found my tongue to shout to him to stop; but he kept on not even turning his head. I was provoked, and spurred my horse in after him as far as I could penetrate, but he kept on, and I lost sight of him in a moment, and whether he can talk at all or not, is more than I can tell."

"Did you look at his feet, Harry?" interrupted one of the party; "I expect it was old—"

"Never mind what you expect—hear me out," he continued. "I followed the trail, which wound about, it seemed to me, towards all the points of the compass, for an hour or more, when at last it led me out into a prairie, which I thought I recognized. I stopped, and was looking around to make out the landmarks when a horse with a saddle on, burst from the woods behind me, and tore off across the prairie, as if he too had seen the devil!"

"What colour was he?" exclaimed half a dozen voices in a breath.

"He was too far off for me to distinguish more than that he was a dark horse—say about as much so as mine. I could distinguish the pommel of the saddle and the stirrups flying."

"Stoner's horse was a dark bay," was buzzed around the table in low tones, every one looking seriously in his neighbour's face.

"Yes," said the Squire, rising and stepping uneasily to the window, "Stoner's horse was

a good deal like yours; he must have got away from him, and that is what detains him. But then the nag was a very kind creature, and well trained. I wonder it should have done so."

"Don't believe 'bay' would have done it, Squire," said one of the men. "Something's gone wrong, I think! Was the bridle down, Mr Henry?"

"It was too far off for me to tell. I followed in the direction the horse took and soon found myself here, and expected to find it here too."

"No! Stoner is beyond here," said the squire. "That wagon train you were twisting and turning about in, is a road I had opened to a number of board-trees we cut and rived out there; you might have followed it for hours and not been more than a mile or so from the place you started from. That ghost of yours by the way, may be some crazy fellow, who has wandered off into these parts with mischief in him! Did you hear no gun?"

"I thought I did—about an hour after parting with that man, or devil, or whatever else he was—but the sound was so faint and distant, that, for fear I might be mistaken, I did not go to it; and the road had turned so frequently. I could not tell whether it was in the direction he went off or not."

Here the "driver" interposed, saying that he had heard a rifle about that time on the right, but supposing it was Henry or Stoner, he took no notice of it. And a half laughing discussion followed as to the probable character of the wood ghost Henry had reported off—some asserting he was quizzing us—for these men were too much accustomed to the exigencies of a hunter's life to be for more than a moment seriously affected by the circumstance of Stoner's non-arrival. In the midst of this, a horse's feet were heard galloping up to the door, and a loud "Hilloo," followed. The Squire rose hastily and went out. In a moment after he entered, looking pale and excited.

"Tom Dix (one of Stoner's neighbours) says that his horse has come home without a rider, the reins upon its neck, and a clot of blood upon the pommel of the saddle! Boys, he's been shot! Just as I suspected from the very first!"

Everybody rose at this announcement—looking in the face of him opposite with a blank pallid stare.

"The crazy man," ejaculated several "Strange!—Very mysterious business," said others.

"I tell you what," said the Squire, after a pause, "has struck me from the first. It is that this strange-looking fellow Henry saw, mistook him for Stoner, until he looked into his face, for Henry's horse and general appearance are not unlike his,—and when he found that he was wrong, got out of the way and went on till he met Stoner himself, and has shot him!"

"No doubt of it," said several.

"But it's a very mysterious affair," he continued—"I know of no such looking man in this region as Henry describes; but at any rate he will be hunted down to-morrow, for Stoner was one of the Regulators, and Hinch is a perfect blood hound! He can hardly escape him, crazy or not crazy!"

This seemed to be the most satisfactory solution of the difficulty, and as it was too dark for us to do anything that night we resumed our seats to discuss over and over again these details; while the Squire sent off a messenger summoning Hinch and the Regulators to be on the ground early the next morning!

Before sun-rise the next morning, Hinch arrived with six men. I was waked by his loud blustering and swearing. He was raving, as I afterwards understood, about Henry; calling his story about the meeting with the remarkable personage—all humbug—and asserting his belief that if a murder had been committed Henry was its author. Our host quieted him in some way, and when we came out the greeted us with a snarling sort of civility. He was a thick-set, broad shouldered, burly looking wretch, with blood shot eyes, and face bearing all the marks of riotous debauchery! Our search was for several days entirely unsuccessful, until Henry by accident found the place where he had encountered the Bearded Ghost, as some one christened him. Here one of the keen eyed hunters found the traces of a large moccassioned foot. These were pursued for several miles and lost, but on spreading our line and continuing the same general course for some distance farther, we at last found indeed the body of Stoner! It had been so much mutilated by the wolves and ravens that little examination was made of the bones. We gathered them together to carry them home to his family, and in doing this I noticed the fracture of a bullet through the back of the skull. It had been stripped bare of flesh, and both eyes plucked out by the birds, and was too shocking an object for close examination. But what puzzled all parties was the discovery, a short distance off, of the trail of a shod horse. Now, there was not a horse in Shelby county that wore shoes, and certainly not one in our party. Shoeing is never thought of, being unnecessary where there are no stones. This was as perfect a puzzle as even Henry's story, and threw yet a greater air of inexplicability around this affair! It was thought that this track might be easily traced to any distance—but after worrying about it for several days, it was given up in despair and the Regulators, fatigued and disheartened, scattered for their respective homes.

But one of their number never reached his. Being missed for two days, there was a general turn out to look for him; and had been the case with Stoner, his body was found torn to pieces by the wolves. The report was, that he too had been shot through the back of the head.

These murders, and the singular circumstances accompanying them, created great sensation. Hinch and his troops scoured the country in every direction, arresting and lynching suspicious persons, as they called them. One poor inoffensive fellow they hung and cut down four or five times, to make him confess, but nothing was elicited; and they left him with barely a spark of life.

That evening, as they were returning to their head quarters at the store, one of them named Winter, missed a portion of his horse furniture, which had become accidentally detached. He said he had observed it in its place a mile back,—that he would return to get it, and rejoin them at the store, by the time they should be ready to commence the spree they had determined on going into that night. He left them, and never returned. They soon got drunk, and did not particularly notice his absence until some time the next day, when his family, alarmed by the return of his horse with an empty saddle, sent to enquire after him. This sort of inquiries had come to be so significant of late, that they were instantly sobered, and mounting, rode back on their trail. Very soon a swarm of buzzards and wolves, near a line of thicker ahead, designated the whereabouts of the object of their search; and there they found his fleshless bones scattered on every side. They were appalled. The reddest-blooded cheek amongst them blanched! It was terrible! They seemed to be doomed! Three of their number dead and torn to pieces within ten days; and yet not the slightest clue to the relentless and invisible foe, but that ghastly story of Henry's and the tracks which only served to tantalize them! It must be some dread supernatural visitation for their hideous crimes! They shivered, while the great drops started from their foreheads, and without thinking of looking for any trail, or even gathering up the bones, they started back at full speed, spreading the alarm everywhere.

The excitement now became universal and tremendous. Nearly the whole country turned out for the purpose of unravelling this alarming mystery; and the superstitious frenzy was in no small degree heightened by the report, that this man had been shot in the same way as the others, in the "back of the head!"

These incidents were all so unaccountable, that I own I felt no little sympathy with the popular associations of a supernatural agency in their perpetration. Henry laughed at all this, but insisted that it was a maniac; and to account for the peculiar dexterity of his escapes and whole management, related many anecdotes of the proverbial cunning of madmen. The wildest, most absurd, and incredible stories were now afloat among the people concerning this deadly and subtle foe of the Regulators; for it was now universally believed and remarked, that it was against them alone that his enmity was directed. The story of Henry was greatly improved upon and added to; and, as some reports had it, the Madman,—as others, the Bearded Ghost, was seen in half a dozen places at the same time; now on foot, stalking with enormous strides across some open glade from thicket to thicket—passing out of sight again before the observer could recover from his surprise;—then mounted, he was seen flying like the shadow of a summer cloud over the prairies, or beneath the gloom of forests, always haggard and lean, dressed in skins with the hair on, and that long, heavy, terrible rifle on his shoulder! I noticed that there was only one class of men who ventured to assert that they had actually seen with their own eyes these wonderful sights, and that was constituted of those who either had suffered, or from their characters and pursuits, were most likely to suffer persecution from the Regulators—the class of hunter emigrants. These men were most industrious in embellishing all the circumstances of character, feats, and relentless hatred to the Regulators, as highly as the excited credulity of the public would bear. They never saw him except in the vicinity of the homes of some one of these hated tyrants! In their versions this being was for ever hovering round them, waiting the moment to strike, while they were alone and far from any help.

They carried this thing so far as to attract attention to it, and arouse in the cunning mind of Hinch the same suspicion which had occurred to Henry and myself, namely, that all this was the result of a profoundly acute and thoroughly organized scheme of this class, headed by some man of peculiar personalities and consummate skill, with the object of exterminating or driving off the Regulators. It seemed impossible, that, without collusion with many others, the murderer should have been able to so baffly all pursuit. Hinch and his band had been thoroughly cowed and awed; but the moment this idea occurred to them, the reaction of their base fears was savage exultation. Here was something tangible; their open and united force could easily exterminate an enemy who had acknowledged their weakness in resorting to secret combination and assassination from "the bush!" They forthwith proclaimed "war to the knife," with the whole class; and during the next week several outrages, so revolting that I will not detail them, were perpetrated upon these men in different parts of the country; and the fact that, during this general tumult, nothing more was seen or seen of the mysterious Rifleman, encouraged them with the belief that they had succeeded in getting rid of him through the intimidation of his confederates.

They had now been for nearly a fortnight in the saddle—had glutted themselves with vengeance, and, as they conceived, broken down this dangerous conspiracy against their power; and if they had not succeeded in detecting and punishing, had at least frightened off their singular foe. They concluded that they might safely disband. That day, after they had se-

parated, one of their number, named Rees—almost as bad and savage a man as Hinch himself—was riding past a thicket, in sight of his own house, when he was shot from it. His negroes heard the gun, and seeing his horse galloping up to the house riderless and snorting wildly, they ran down, and found him stretched in the road dead. He "was shot in the eye," and the ball passed out at the back of his head.

When Hinch heard this, he turned perfectly livid, his knees smote together and with a horrible oath, he exclaimed, "It's Jack Long, or his ghost, by G—come back for vengeance!" It was now perceived, for the first time, that all the men had been shot through the eye, instead of in the back of the head, where the ball had only passed out after entering at the socket. The other heads had been too unpleasantly mutilated for examination, and this fact had not been before observed. Of course, everybody was satisfied now, that this terrible being was in one way or another identified with Jack Long; for the notoriety of his favorite mark and his matchless skill instantly occurred to all as accounting for much that was unaccountable in these occurrences. This produced a great change in public feeling. The better sort began to conceive that they understood the whole matter. The lynching Jack had received was fresh in their memories, and they supposed that its severity had shaken his mental balance and made him a monomaniac, and that the disease had endowed him with the marvellous cunning—the staunch, murderous hate—and the unnatural appearance, which had created such sensation. They could not understand how a being so simple-hearted, and sluggish as he was reputed to have been, could have been roused or stung to such deeds by the mere depth and power of his natural passions. But monomaniac or not, such a vengeance, and the daring conduct of the whole affair, were very imposing to their associations and prepossessions, and they sympathized heartily with him. It was only while the general uncertainty left every man in doubt whether his own person might not be next the object of this murderous aim, that the public were disposed to back the Rangers in whatever violent measures they might choose to resort to, to drag the secret to light, and the actor to punishment; but now that it was apparent his whole hate was levelled against the Rangers, and all that uncertainty was confined to them, he the devil, ghost, madman, or Jack Long, the public had no intention of interfering again. It was a personal issue between him and them—they might settle it between themselves! Indeed, men felt in their inmost hearts that every man of the ten engaged in the lynching of Jack Long deserved a dozen times over to be shot; and now they looked on coolly, rather enjoying the thing, and earnestly hoping that Jack might have the best of it.

And of this there seemed to be a strong probability; for the Regulators made only one more attempt to get together; but another of their number being killed on his way to the rendezvous, his body bearing that well known and fearful signature of skill, the remaining five, perfectly unnerved and overwhelmed with terror, retreated to their houses, and scarcely dared for several weeks to put their heads outside their own doors.

The class to which Jack belonged, at least those of them who had managed to keep a footing during the relentless proscription of the Regulators, now began to look up, and hinted that they had known of Jack's return from the time of Stoner's murder, and had aided and abetted his purposes in every way in their power; furnishing him with fresh horses when the noble animal he rode back from the States became fatigued; assisting his flights and concealments, and furnishing him with information, as well as spreading the exaggerated stories about him. One bluff old fellow remarked,

"You are fools who talk about Jack's being crazy! He's as calm and cold as a frosty morning up in old Keatuck; and his head's as clear as a bell! He's just got his Indian fighting and Toryhain' blood waxed up in him by them stripes! That's blood you know that's dangerouser than a catamount when it once gets riz!"

Jack was now frequently seen, but it was known that his work was only half done, and that he meant to finish it, and he was regarded with great curiosity and awe. The five wretched men were entirely unstrung and panic stricken. They made no attempt at retaliation, but all their hopes seemed to lie in the effort to get out of his reach. That long heavy rifle haunted them day and night. They saw its dark muzzle bearing on them from every bush, and through the chinks of their own cabins!

One of them, named White, was an inventive toper, with all his terror could not resist his inclination for liquor, and after a confinement in his house nearly three weeks, determined to risk all and to go to the store and buy him a barrel. He went in a covered wagon, driven by a negro, while he lay stretched on the bottom in the straw. The barrel of liquor was obtained—he got into the wagon—lay down beside it, and started for home. All the way he never raised his head until, near the mouth of his lane, a log had been placed on the side of the road which tilted up the wagon on him. He forgot his caution, and sprang up with his head out of the cover to curse the boy for his carelessness, and at that moment a rifle was discharged. He fell back dead—shot through the eye! The boy said that his master suddenly cut short his oaths, and exclaimed, "There he is!" at the moment the gun fired. He saw a tall man with a beard hanging down on his breast and dressed in skins, walking off through the brush with his rifle on his shoulder.