

THE STAIN OF HUMAN BLOOD.

It Can Never Be Washed Out—Observations On the Horrors That Attend a Slayer of His Fellow-Man.

By T. Larry Gantt.

The thing of taking the life of a human being except in self-defense, during excitement or on the field of battle is a terrible thing and unless a man be hardened into brutality and is utterly devoid of conscience it will haunt him to his dying day.

Three times during my career I have deliberately made up my mind to kill, but determined to make my antagonists first the assailants and to give them a fair showing, and thus put my own life in jeopardy. But when the necessity for any such encounter had passed the feeling of relief was indescribable.

Thousands upon thousands of useful and brilliant lives have been blighted and rendered miserable by the taking of human life; even when the killing was justified both in the sight of man and by the laws of the land, the curse of Cain follows the slayer his entire days.

My father, I think, was with the Hon. Wm. L. Yancey, the great Secession leader, when he killed Dr. Earle, of Greenville. They were boys together, were warm friends, and I have often heard my father speak of the circumstance. Yancey killed Earle as the latter was advancing upon him with an upraised walking cane, and when the fatal shot was fired. Just before the late war between the States my father and Mr. Yancey met in Montgomery, Ala. Mr. Yancey, in discussing the tragedy, stated that he had no intention of shooting Dr. Earle, but the encounter took place in the piazza of the postoffice, an old wooden building opposite the Mansion House in Greenville, and which piazza had no railing, being several feet from the ground. Dr. Earle attacked Mr. Yancey because he had slapped the face of his little son, Elias, there being no very kind feeling between the two men. Dr. Earle raised his cane and advanced upon Mr. Yancey, who drew his pistol, presented it and retreated backward. Mr. Yancey stated that he had no intention of shooting the doctor, but wanted to intimidate him. In stepping backward he felt that he had reached the extreme end of the piazza and, in order to prevent falling off, had inadvertently pressed the trigger. But, the great Southern statesman told my father, he would freely give fame, fortune and all he possessed and again start life a poor, ignorant and obscure man, could he, by doing so, only wipe that blood from his hands; that often, in the midst of his most brilliant orations, would he see the figure of Dr. Earle, with that upraised cane as when the tragedy was enacted, rise before him. It haunted him day and night, and while he was justified in the killing and the sentence imposed by the law was light, his life was unending remorse and self-reproach. Years after the killing, when Mr. Yancey returned to visit his mother-in-law, Mrs. Earle, in Greenville, and Elias had grown to manhood, the young man, who had innocently caused the death of his father, appeared before the gate with shotgun in hand and asked to see Col. Yancey. Yancey, from behind the closed door, told Elias to go away and he would return to Alabama and not visit Greenville again; that he had more of the Earle blood then upon his hands than he could ever wash away and did not want any more. This visit would probably have resulted fatally had not the old lady, who, like all of the Earles, was as brave as a lion, seized a shotgun and told

Elias that he must go away and not further molest her guest, and that if he attempted any violence toward Yancey he must first fire through her. The next day Mr. Yancey left for Alabama, and did not ever return again, I think, to South Carolina until as a delegate to the Charleston convention.

If the killing of a human being can be made justifiable it was that of Bynum by Perry. Bynum was a noted duelist, and had been employed to provoke Perry into a fight and take his life. The two men represented extreme factions in South Carolina politics, and which were as bitter as in the days of Tillmanism and Conservatism. Bynum was an expert with the pistol, and had killed, so I am told, more than one man. On the other hand, Perry had but little if any practice with that weapon, being a man of peace, but undoubted courage. But Perry's steady nerve and cool head proved superior to the skill of his antagonist, who was killed at the first fire, and his grave is still pointed out at the historic Rock church, near Clemson college. But even the knowledge that this duel had been forced on him, and that his enemy was given an equal, if not better showing for his life, could never wipe the red stain from the tender conscience of Governor Perry. One of his sons told me that he never heard the subject mentioned but once in his father's presence, when his face grew deathly pale, he raised his hand and stated that he never again wanted to hear that duel spoken of by any member of his family. That the horror of that tragedy, committed on a little island in the Savannah river, haunted this great and good man all his days is not doubted, and it cast a dark cloud over a brilliant life.

I have known a great many men who had taken human life under all manner of circumstances, and without a single exception they wore the brand of Cain upon their brows. There was no pleasure or happiness in store for them. Their existence was one long reign of remorse and self-reproach, and if they did not manifest the same by word of mouth, it could be seen in the restless eye, and nervous starting at every unusual noise. Many turned for consolation to drink, and which only added fuel to the eternal fires that ever burned within them. Others prospered, but during those intervals when the mind was permitted to wander back to the past, a look of haggard misery overspread their faces. The brand of Cain was fixed upon the brows of those shedders of human blood by Divine vengeance, and only death can erase it.

I remember, while living in Oglethorpe county, Georgia, talking with a young friend of mine who had gone with a party to chastise a negro for a reported insult to a white woman. This young man was stationed at a window through which the negro endeavored to escape. He fired on the man and shot him dead, his body hanging over the sill. This young man, who was a successful merchant, stated to me that he afterward discovered that he had killed an innocent and slandered man, and the party who had made up that story was enraged against the negro because he had intended to leave his farm and he wanted to have him chastised. But my young friend stated to me that his whole life was blighted, and his entire existence one of misery and remorse; that the sight of the poor negro haunted him all day long and was a constant nightmare. Freely would he give up all he possessed and become a convict in stripes to have that stain washed from his conscience. He often felt that did he possess the wealth of the world he would freely

give it for even one day's relief from the agony of mind that pursued him, and that he might experience the feeling of innocence he knew before that wretched night.

Were this globe of ours coined into gold and placed at my disposal to take the life of the most debased and miserable human being that walks the earth, even under the most justifiable circumstances, I would scorn the bribe.

Unless a man, as I have stated, has a heart scarred with sin, and is incapable of feeling remorse, I sometimes think it would be an act of mercy and kindness to put him to death, after wilfully and deliberately taking the life of a fellow man. A jury may acquit him, and he may live a long life, applauded and honored by the world, but there beats in his breast an inner monitor, and which will ever keep him reminded of that dark deed. His entire existence will be one prolonged agony, and there will ever walk by his side in day, and repose upon his pillow at night, an unseen spectre of the dead man, and from which terrible and constant visitor there is no escape.

The murderer is reminded of the fate that awaits him by the Bible, and which commands that "He who sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed."

I admit that there are occasions when it becomes imperatively necessary to take human life, but my greatest hope and desire is that no such dread alternative shall ever be forced upon myself. I had sooner go to my grave the victim of another, than spend my days on earth with hands dripping with the life-blood of any one created in God's own image.

Life is sweet, but it is anything but sweet to a red-handed murderer.

In penning this article I had no individual case in mind, but give it as the observation of my life and a warning.

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