

**HILT TO HILT: OR, DAYS AND
NIGHTS ON THE BANKS OF THE
SHENANDOAH IN THE AUTUMN OF
1864; FROM THE MSS. OF
COLONEL SURRY OF EAGLE'S NEST**

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Hilt to hilt: or, Days and nights on the banks of the Shenandoah in the autumn of 1864; from the mss. of Colonel Surry of Eagle's Nest by John Esten Cooke

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JOHN ESTEN COOKE

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OR,

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IN THE

AUTUMN OF 1864.

From the *Ass.* of Colonel Surry of Eagle's Nest.

BY

JOHN ESTEN COOKE,

AUTHOR OF "FAIRFAX," "SCREY OF EAGLE'S NEST," ETC., ETC.



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PROLOGUE.



COLONEL SURRY TO THE READER :

I perform a bold exploit to-day, my dear reader. The exploit in question is sending *Hilt to Hilt* to the press.

It is a long time now since 1866, and, if you have read, you have probably forgotten the volume entitled *Surry of Eagle's Nest*.

Alas ! authors must expect to be lost sight of as the years flow on. I am not so vain as to imagine you remember my memoirs ; and, for a stronger reason still, you must have forgotten their reception by my critical friends of New England. They were flayed by those fierce foemen. I recall the ceremony with a nervous shiver. Those terrible literary Camanches brandished the tomahawk, uttered the war-whoop, and performed a dance of fearful triumph around the prostrate and bleeding victim.

The unfortunate memoirs of Colonel Surry were "highly-seasoned . . . duels and murderous settlements of deadly feuds kept up the excitement" . . . the author need not fear that his portrait of Stuart would "bore any one fifty years hence," as nobody at that remote period would know of the book's existence . . . parts were "cribbed from Dickens" . . . "it might find a good market with the 'New York Ledger.'" . . . the style was "so excessively florid, that but for the perpetual flow of incident it would be intolerable!" . . . and "the literary execution was in that exaggerated style in which the Southern writers so often indulge!"

All this, and more, descended on the unfortunate Colonel Surry.

Well, that *bon mot* about "fifty years hence" made me laugh. The phrases "excessively florid" and "exaggerated style" made me reflect. Was I then so very florid and exaggerated, as my friends declared? I had supposed the MS. of *Surry of Eagle's Nest* to have been composed in a most compact, terse, and altogether faultless style; — and here was a great critic, and a critic in Boston,

which was worse still, declaring that I was florid and exaggerated!

What to do? Alas! *Surry of Eagle's Nest* was printed. The poor youth had made his entrance into the bustling world, and the mischief was done. I could only resolve that, in future, I would never be florid or exaggerated any more — that I would avoid the errors of the past: another flaying, like that received from the Pilgrim sons of New England, would, I felt, put an end to my career.

In the present episode of my memoirs, therefore, good reader, which I call *Hilt to Hilt*, I tell a plain and unadorned story. I hope the style is not florid; I know the events, strange as they appear, are not exaggerated. It is almost impossible, indeed, to exaggerate the wild romance of that Partisan life of 1864. I have lived in the midst of it; seen it with my eyes; known and spoken with the actors in it; and yet I assure you that I find it difficult to realize that the whole was not a dream.

Let me repeat that whatever seems strangest in this book is substantially, when not literally, true. There were one or two additional incidents which I