

**THE TEXAS VENDETTA,  
OR, THE SUTTON-  
TAYLOR FEUD**

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The Texas Vendetta, Or, The Sutton-Taylor Feud by Victor M. Rose

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# THE TEXAS VENDETTA.

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## CHAPTER I.

"While of ten thousand herds there strays  
But one along yon river's maze,  
The Gael, of plain and river betw,  
Shall, with strong hand, redeem his share."

FOURTEEN long and weary years have passed away since the terrible "Taylor-Sutton Feud" originated in De Witt County, Texas. Fourteen years ago, with the extinction of one life, a cloud "no larger than a man's hand" arose above the horizon of our political sky, already surcharged with the latent elements of a storm that was destined to sweep West Texas with a breath more potent for destruction than the besom of war itself.

The little cloud grew like Jonah's vine, as precious lives were added to replenish the fast-consuming fuel that fed the flame, until a heavy pall, portending evil to all who dared to dispel its lowering gloom, hung suspended over West Texas, with a tenure as brittle as the sword of Damocles.

Originating as a family feud, its direful proportions were evolved from the pernicious enforcement of the cruel "Reconstruction Acts" of Congress.

Raging fiercely at times, as officers of the law, and custodians of the peace and dignity of the State, "winked" at the deeds perpetrated when vengeance found vent in the hasty council whose mildest decree was proscription, and who, had not God set a bound to the latitude of man's revenge, would not have rested satisfied with the execution of the supreme penalty—DEATH. At other times smoldering almost to extinction, when the demands of the roused people awoke timid and corrupt officials to a lingering sense of duty, and sporadic efforts were made to suppress the evil and vindicate the majesty of insulted law.

As is the case always in matters of this nature, every man summarily "got away with"—which in the provincial vocabulary meant assassination—or ostracized, recruited the ranks constantly thinned by the messengers of Fate, from the peaceful community—friends of the victim—determined to avenge his loss, and who previously had kept aloof from the affair; and by this species of recruiting a deadly foud, that was originally confined to a few individuals of one county, has spread until a vast section of country and many hundreds of good men have been involuntarily involved in the ghastly Saturnalia, from whose destructive orgies, admittance having once been gained, retreat is impossible.

So fearful has every one been of being drawn into the membership of one or the other party to this vendetta, that no one has had the temerity to ventilate its deeds in the journals of the land; for the emissaries of the contending factions are as subtle and numerous as were the spies of the Spanish Inquisition, and their decrees as swift and implacable as the death stroke of

the Vehmic Tribunal of old. The primal source of the whole evil was the irregular manner in which the nomadic stock-raisers, conducted their business ; and, to properly understand the matter, the reader who is not acquainted with the condition of affairs in Texas will require a brief description of the state of this industry at the inception of the vendetta ; which, indeed, has so continued since, with an infinitesimal improvement in the pastures recently inclosed, and prior to a period as remote, I imagine, as the establishment of the first *ranch* on Texas soil.

Imagine a vast expanse of country—as extensive as the State of New York—comprising prairie, woodland, and the dense, thorny chaparral, with settlements scattered often twenty and thirty miles apart. Throughout this region roam countless multitudes of cattle and horses, bearing brands and ear-marks, a copy of which would fill a volume as large as the Bible. The former comprise every letter and combination of letters in the alphabet, and often Roman and Arabian numerals, and hieroglyphics ; while the latter include every disfigurement of the ear that the ingenuity of man can devise. These herds, with the innumerable indices of their ownership burned upon their flesh, and cut into their ears, form one inextricably confused heterogeneous mass, and are frequently found hundreds of miles from the *ranchos* of their owners.

The stockmen brand their calves and colts every spring and autumn, and for this purpose they hunt in parties of from ten to one hundred, and brand and release the animal wherever found. As many calves and colts escape the closest scrutiny, they are, when weaned, called “dobies” and “mavericks,” and afford



an exciting emulation to the enterprising youth, who holds with undisputed title all that he may succeed in branding. Thus was a door left wide open to theft, through which, alas! too many have entered, some to experience the rigors of justice in the penitentiary, others to seek refuge in flight, and still others to escape detection and revel in their ill-gotten gains.

Another implied invitation to earn money, at the expense of honesty and the *bona fide* owner, was discovered in the loose manner of selling beeves. A man often *assumes* an "agency" for men living at a distance, and proceeds forthwith to sell their beeves indiscriminately with his own. True, each animal sold must be inspected by an officer, who records the brand and mark; but it is no exaggeration to say that thousands of beeves thus sold were entirely lost to the rightful owners. These two species of theft were considered to have somewhat of legitimacy thrown around them by the sanction of immemorial custom. But, as "dobies" and "agencies" did not pan out fast enough, the enterprising "boys" devised other means through which to attain the regal eminence of cattle sovereignty. The principal of these modes, and one that resulted in a "bonanza" to the fortunate (?) projectors, in many instances, was the recording of another man's brand and the appropriation of his stock. The *modus operandi* was as follows: Discovering a good many beeves in the range belonging to some man living at a distance, the bonanza-seeker would have the brand recorded, and proceed immediately to sell the easily acquired property. This seems improbable to one who has not "seen with his own eyes;" but that the custom did obtain up to a very recent date, the following

"notice," taken from the *Oakville Tribune* less than six months ago, "is confirmation strong as proof of holy writ :

"All persons are hereby warned not to trade for, or purchase of one —, of — County, any stock in the following brands and marks [here follow the hieroglyphics], as he has recorded my ancient horse and cattle brands."

Another mode of procedure, more nefarious than the preceding, was the altering and disfiguring of brands and marks. And yet another, but not so popular, on account of the risk it entailed upon enterprise, was to cancel the brand upon an animal by burning a *fac-simile* immediately underneath the original—called "counter-branding"—and the thief's brand upon another portion of the body. The former brand being canceled, the latter gave a *prima facie* evidence of ownership. These latter methods *had not* theegis of legitimacy thrown around them, and were not countenanced among the "cattle kings" and their adherents. To such an extent did these species of theft attain that small fortunes were realized in an incredibly short period of time, and, as a natural consequence, the "lowlanders" thus remorselessly preyed upon became incensed and exasperated at the too frequent incursions of the "Gael."

I may add, in concluding this portion of the subject, that the appropriation of "dobies" was a universal custom among stockmen. And though it was regarded not exactly square for one who had no "claim" on the prairie to indulge in this lucrative pursuit, the easy, good-natured *rancheros* generally forbore, and many well-to-do stockmen of West Texas to-day never paid

a dollar for cattle, but "got their start" from a "doby" foundation. The "agency" business, though yet extensive, is not so general as formerly; and that it does prevail up to this date is illustrated from the fact that the gentleman who warned persons from buying cattle from the man that had recorded his ancient brands, announces in the columns of the same journal that :

"All persons selling my beeves are merely required to make a fair settlement, anything in the late stock-law to the contrary notwithstanding."

This gentleman, I. M. Ussery, of Oakville, Texas (I give his address in full, as it should be written in letters of gold beside that of him who loved his fellow-men), concludes this "notice" as follows :

*"All persons in want are authorized to kill my beeves for food, and to milk my cows!"*

Is not this a practical illustration of the lesson sought to be promulgated by the divine Son of Mary near two thousand years ago ?

The disfiguring of brands continues to such an extent yet, that the press of Corpus Christi very recently called the attention of the stockmen to its prevalence in that vicinity. But the recording of another's brand presents the speediest means of acquiring an independent fortune. Hence its popularity.

Does not the prevalence of this last misconduct, and the impunity with which it has been committed, demonstrate a criminal remissness of duty on the part of Texan legislatures? Why was a crime so susceptible of positive proof not made a penal offense? A single statute with this object would have saved thousands of dollars' worth of property to the *bona fide*