

**THE HISTORY OF
VIRGIL A. STEWART,
AND HIS ADVENTURE**

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H. R. HOWARD

**THE HISTORY OF
VIRGIL A. STEWART,
AND HIS ADVENTURE**

THE HISTORY
OF
VIRGIL A. STEWART,
AND HIS
ADVENTURE

IN CAPTURING AND EXPOSING THE GREAT "WESTERN LAND
PIRATE" AND HIS GANG, IN CONNEXION
WITH THE EVIDENCE;

ALSO OF THE
TRIALS, CONFESSIONS, AND EXECUTION

OF

A NUMBER OF MURRELL'S ASSOCIATES IN THE STATE OF
MISSISSIPPI DURING THE SUMMER OF 1835, AND THE
EXECUTION OF FIVE PROFESSIONAL GAMBLERS
BY THE CITIZENS OF VICKSBURG,
ON THE 6TH JULY, 1835.

"I am not willing to admit to the world that I believe him,"—*of bitter enemy*

"I care nothing for his jealous animosity. He may vent his poisonous spleen. I am sustained
before the world by evidence that shall clain his envenomed tongue."—*Stewart.*

COMPILED BY H. R. HOWARD.

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P R E F A C E.

THE public have long been expecting the final history of Virgil A. Stewart's perilous and romantic adventure in capturing "John A. Murrell," the great "Western Land Pirate." We now propose giving a full and perfect account of that strange performance, in connexion with the evidence sustaining each important fact as it is related. We make no pretensions to author-craft, or skill in working up materials so as to heighten interest; nor is it necessary. The deep interest that every Southerner and every honest man must feel in the subject matter of this history, is sufficient to invest a plain and simple statement of facts with attraction. Our only care has been to adhere strictly to the truth, and to exhibit the details in a clear and intelligible narrative.

We have commenced with a brief account of Mr. Stewart's early life to the time when he undertook the capture of Murrell and his party. We then continue with his adventure on that expedition, and conclude with a full history of the insurrectionary movements among the negroes in the southern country during the summer of 1835. In

the perusal of this narrative the reader will be made acquainted with many scenes of horror and depravity.

When the "Western Land Pirate" was in course of publication, Mr. Stewart's health was such that he could pay but little attention to the task of supervision, which rendered it very imperfect in many respects, and especially in the omission of some important portions of his conversation with Murrell, and of his reasons for many proceedings that should have been explained to the reader:—but as the only object of that narrative was to arouse the people of that region to a sense of their danger, past and present, he deemed it unnecessary to delay the publication.

As an apology for the detention of this work, we would remind the public that Mr. Stewart has been compelled to travel over a vast country in collecting his evidence for the compilation. In conclusion, we would congratulate those of Mr. Stewart's friends who have nobly stood by him in the hour of danger and persecution, amid a legion of exasperated enemies. He has ably sustained himself and his cause, and proved himself worthy of the confidence reposed in him by his fellow-citizens.

In the compilation of this work the most of Murrell's profanity has been suppressed; but retaining his manner of expression in every other particular, and in all cases the substance of his conversation has been preserved.

LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
VIRGIL A. STEWART.

A BRIEF history of the early life of Mr. Virgil A. Stewart, whose adventures will form the subject of the following pages, may not here be out of place, not only as a gratification of public curiosity, but as an important commentary upon the facts to be disclosed in the succeeding narrative ; since, in substantiating the character of Mr. Stewart as a worthy and reputable citizen, the reader will be the better enabled to reject the unfounded and malicious imputations attempted to be cast upon him by some of the more daring emissaries of the Murrell gang.

Mr. Stewart was born in Jackson county, in the State of Georgia, of highly respectable parentage. His father, Mr. Samuel Stewart, migrated to Amite county, in Mississippi, while Virgil was yet an infant, and died there a few months after his arrival. His widow, becoming dissatisfied with that part of the country, returned to the State of Georgia, where her son Virgil grew up to manhood. He was sent to school until he was fourteen years of age ; but little attention was paid to his pecuniary interests, and a large portion of his slender patrimony was squandered.

His early desire was to receive a liberal education ; but the income of his father's estate would not allow of the expenses attendant upon a classical course.

Soon after he left school he engaged in the printing business, as an employment best suited to improve his mind. Relinquishing this, he afterward entered into a copartnership with a manufacturer of cotton-gins, in his native place, with whom he employed his time and a small capital to great advantage.

By the time he had reached his twentieth year, he had established a character for industry, decision of character, and much moral worth, among his fellow-citizens. About this time his term of partnership expired by its own limitation, and he determined to travel, and seek a place to settle upon amid the newer regions of the western country.

He concluded upon migrating to Madison county, in Tennessee, whither he removed with his property in the fall of 1830, and settled upon a farm, with his negroes, six miles west of Jackson. Here he remained until the latter part of the year 1832, closely attending to his farm and business, when he concluded to sell off his property, remove to the Choctaw Purchase, and invest his whole property in land in that country.

Mr. Stewart had now, by industry and economy, increased the little estate left him by his father to a respectable competency for a young man just starting in life ; with this he made his arrangements for visiting the Choctaw Purchase, and furnished himself with such articles of merchandise as he expected to sell with profit to the Indians and early settlers of that region.

On the first day of June, 1833, Mr. Stewart left Jackson in high spirits, on board a boat bound for Tuscahoma, in the Choctaw Purchase, and arrived at

Odom's landing, on the Yallabusha river, twelve miles below Tuscahoma, on the third day of July, where the boat was forced to land for want of water.

He had a house prepared for the reception of his goods about one mile above the town of Tuscahoma; but, soon after his arrival, sold off his stock on credit, and began examining the country so as to be prepared to enter land as soon as opportunity should offer, in which labours he was engaged until the Chocchuma land-sales in the same fall.

The period of Mr. Stewart's life at which we have now arrived is a point where it becomes necessary to examine with the strictest scrutiny every act, no matter how trivial—and not only is it necessary to notice his acts, but to scan with severity his motives for acting. No matter how trifling the circumstances here recorded, they will be found important in the progress of the narrative.

While he was attending the land-sales at Chocchuma, and awaiting the settlement of his late affairs, a Mr. Clanton, who had established a little country store in the neighbourhood, and with whom he had formerly been slightly acquainted in Tennessee, requested him to take the agency of his business until he could go to Tennessee for his family and return, alleging, as a reason for his request, "that he had been selling goods on credit, and that many of his customers would take advantage of his absence, and leave the country without paying their arrearages, as the greater part of them were strangers of doubtful character."

At this time Mr. Stewart was very much occupied with his own affairs; but, ever ready to accommodate a