

J. W. Buel

THE BORDER OUTLAWS



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An Authentic and Thrilling History of Jesse and Frank James

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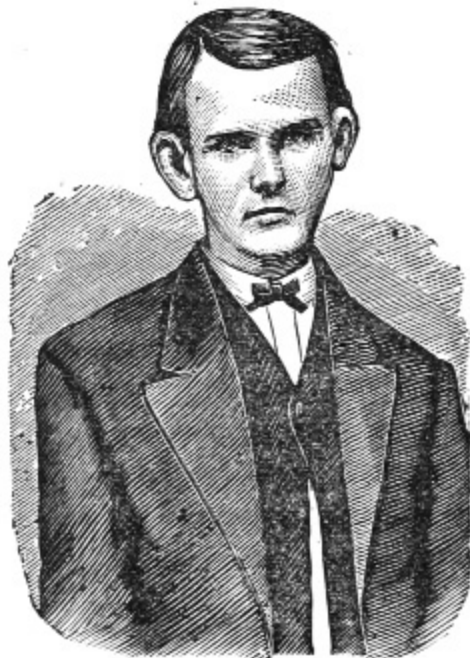
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FRANK JAMES.



JESSE JAMES.

PREFACE.

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The career of Jesse and Frank James has been as checkered as the sunlight that streams through a latticed window, and their crimes are a commentary upon the development of intellectual America. No one can afford to ignore the lesson which the lives of these outlaws teach, and therefore a correct history of their desperate deeds becomes necessary as a part of the country's annals, in juxtaposition with the commendable heroism of our brightest characters. So many improbable and romantic incidents have been credited to these noted brothers by sensational writers; so many dashing escapades and hair-breadth escapes attributed to them, which they never even dreamed of, that thinking people, especially in the East, have begun, almost, to regard the James Boys as a myth, and their deeds as creations of sensational dreamers.

It has been my purpose for more than three years to prepare a true history of these noted outlaws, and during that time material has been collecting which is now given to the public entirely free from fulsome description or elaborated sensation. In the main essentials the James Boys themselves will confirm the truthfulness of this narrative, which has been written with a special regard for candor and indisputable facts only.

During several years of the most exciting period in the career of these noted bandits, I was engaged as reporter for the Kansas City press, and not only became acquainted with many of their relatives and friends who reside in that section, from whom were obtained numerous facts and

incidents never before published; but my duties as a journalist gave me many excellent opportunities to learn the real truth in regard to many of their most daring adventures, to one of which (the robbing of the cash-box at the Kansas City Fair) I was an eye-witness. As time unfolds the mysteries which have gathered around the names of these desperate outlaws, it will be seen that this is the most faithful history of their exploits that has ever been presented to the public.

J. W. B.

St. Louis, December 15, 1880.

JESSE AND FRANK JAMES.

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THEIR YOUTH.

Strangely, and yet a not uncommon circumstance, Jesse and Frank James were the sons of a respectable Kentucky minister of the Baptist persuasion. Rev. Robt. James, "in the good old times," as he was wont to call the early days of his ministry, was a great camp-meeting exhorter, and many of the rock-ribbed hills of middle Kentucky have been musical with the echoes of his strong voice. Like many other pastoral exhorters and close communionists, the Rev. James was illiterate so far as "book learning" was concerned, but his sincerity was rarely debated. It has been asserted that he passed an academic course at Georgetown College, but the records of that institution show the name of no such person. Zerelda Cole, (the mother of the noted outlaws,) was married to the Rev. Robert James in Scott county, Kentucky, the same county in which Georgetown College is located; this fact, added to the desire to heroize, to the largest possible extent, the paternity of the James boys, is doubtless the reason for ascribing to the father "a finished education and unusual ability."

"Like father, like son," is a very ancient oriental adage; but it does not apply to Jesse and Frank James, though it is true that their dispositions are due to maternal inheritance. In fact, the wife's strength of will and uncompanionable traits of character resulted in a final separation a few years after their removal to Clay county, Missouri, in 1843. The Rev. James, in 1849, joined in the pilgrimage to California,

from whence he never returned; and, in 1857, Mrs. James took another husband, in the person of Dr. Reuben Samuels. It is quite unimportant to follow the domestic career of Mrs. James, now Mrs. Samuels, and what has been related is merely for the purpose of defining the inherited bent and inclination of the parents of the great outlaws.

Jesse James was born in Clay county, Missouri, in 1845, while Frank's nativity is Scott county, Kentucky, where he was born in 1841. At an extremely early age they displayed traits of character which have ever since distinguished them. Their hatreds were always bitter and their cruelty remorseless.

They manifested especial delight in punishing dumb animals, which is evidenced by their cutting off the tails and ears of dogs and cats, burying small animals alive, and diversions of every kind which would inflict the most grievous pains. Among other boys they were domineering and cruel, and would rarely participate in innocent amusements. They were never subjected to parental restraint and their youth was passed in the most perfect indulgence. At the age of ten and fourteen years, respectively, the boys were provided with fire-arms, in the use of which they readily became proficient, and were no less expert in throwing a bowie-knife which they could send quivering into a two-inch sapling, at the space of fifteen feet, almost without fail.

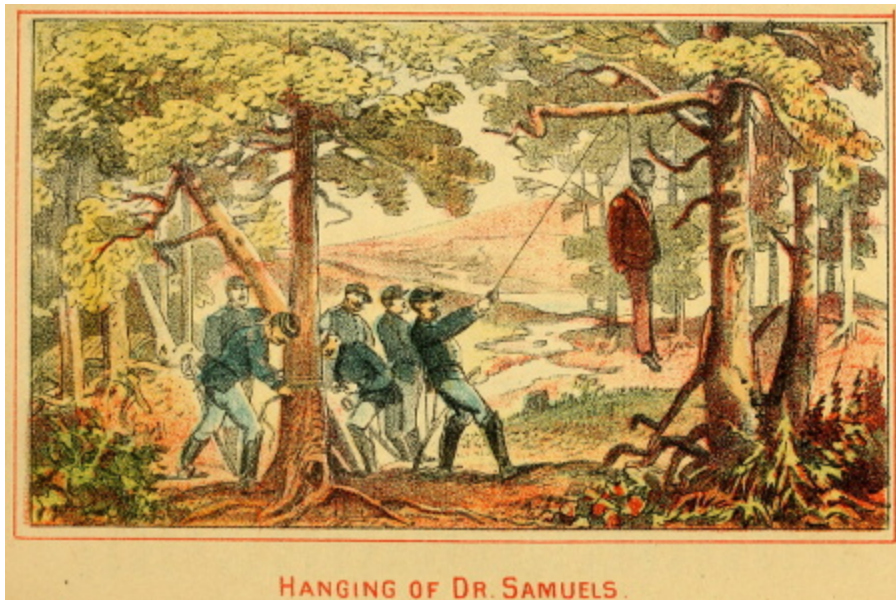
THEIR CAREER AS GUERRILLAS.

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When the tocsin of war sounded, and the feverish thrill of excitement ran through the nation, boys though they were, Jesse and Frank James were electrified with the ominous news and longed to participate in the affray where human blood might be drawn until, like a fountain, it would swell into a gory river. Soon the unmerciful Quantrell, that terrible wraith of slaughter, came trooping through Missouri upon an errand of destruction, and attracted to his banner many impetuous youths of the West, among whom was Frank James; Jesse being the junior brother, and but little more than fourteen years of age, was rejected by Quantrell, and returned home to his farm labors with sorrow. But he did not remain inactive. The family being intensely Southern in their political predilections, all possible aid and sympathy were given to Quantrell. Many dark nights Jesse would mount his best horse and ride through the gloomy wilderness of Western Missouri until he gained the guerrilla haunts, where he would deliver important information concerning the movements of Federal troops.

The part played by Jesse and the open and decided expressions frequently made by Dr. Samuels and his decidedly demonstrative wife, greatly excited the Federal soldiers, and it was determined to make an example of the family. Accordingly, in June, 1862, a company of Missouri militia approached the Samuels' homestead, which is near Kearney, in Clay county, and first meeting Dr. Samuels, they soon gave him to understand that their visit was made for a purpose decidedly unpleasant to him.

A strong rope was produced with which he was securely pinioned and then led away from the house a distance of about one hundred yards. Here the rope was fastened in a noose around his neck, while the other end was thrown over the limb of a tree, and several men hastily drew him up and left him suspended to choke to death. Mrs. Samuels, however, had followed stealthily, and the moment the militia had departed she rushed to the rescue of her husband, whom she hastily cut down, and by patient nursing saved his life. The enraged troops decided also to hang Jesse James, whom they found plowing in the field, but his youth saved him from any other violence than a few cuffs and the production of a rope with a suspicious noose which they threatened to ornament his neck with if he again visited the guerrilla camp.



Instead of producing the desired effect, this act of the militia only excited Jesse the more, and led him to deeds of graver importance. He continued to communicate almost daily with Quantrell, which so exasperated the militia that they paid a second visit to the Samuels' residence, decided

upon killing both Dr. Samuels and the daring Jesse. When they reached the place, however, they found their intended victims absent, but, determined not to return without some trophy of their revengeful sortie, they took Mrs. Samuels and her daughter, Miss Susie, captive, and carried them to St. Joseph, where they were kept confined in jail for several weeks. This last act greatly inflamed Jesse's passions, and he immediately mounted his horse and again rode to Quantrell's camp, where, after detailing the particulars of this last outrage, perhaps exaggerating the facts some in order to make his appeal more effective, he begged the guerrilla commander to accept his services as a private. So hard did he plead for permission to join the ranks that marched under the shadow of the black flag, that at length the barrier which his youth imposed was overlooked and the terrible Quantrell oath was administered to him.

THE FIRST SKIRMISHES.

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Up to this time the guerrillas had been engaged in but few skirmishes, their services consisting chiefly in small foraging expeditions, making themselves thoroughly acquainted with the topography of the country preparatory to engaging in more effective measures. There was a slight brush at Richfield, in which Captain Scott, with twelve of Quantrell's men, surprised thirty militia whom they captured, after killing ten, and in this attack Jesse James participated. Upon his return to camp he was sent out with orders from Quantrell to scour the counties adjoining Clay and locate the militia. After passing through Clinton county he paid a short visit to his mother, who received him with many manifestations of pleasure, and then began to unload herself of the valuable information she had gathered for the benefit of the guerrillas. She told him that the attack on Richfield had resulted in massing the militia for a determined stroke, and that the troops were concentrating near that point; that Plattsburg had been almost entirely relieved of its garrison and would fall an easy prey to the guerrillas if they chose to profit by the opportunity.

Jesse lost no time in communicating the situation to Quantrell, and, accordingly, three days after the capture of the squad of militiamen at Richfield, Captain Scott took fifteen men and silently stole upon Plattsburg, which he found defended by less than a score of Federals, under the command of a lieutenant. The guerrillas dashed into the town about 3 P. M. (August 25th), yelling like a tribe of Comanche Indians. The citizens fled into their houses with

such fear that few ventured to look into the streets even through key holes. The Federal lieutenant chanced to be in the public square when the charge was made, and Jesse James had the honor and credit of capturing him. The rest of the militia gained the court-house, where it would have been impossible to dislodge them, and to have attacked the building would have exposed the guerrillas to the fire of the enemy. It was here that Jesse James' strategy and military tact were first manifested. Turning his prisoner (the lieutenant) over to Captain Scott, he said in a loud voice: "Captain, there is no use parleying with these cut-throats; shoot this fellow if he don't order his men in the court-house to surrender immediately." Captain Scott replied that he would if the court-house was not surrendered in two minutes. The result was that Plattsburg fell into the hands of the guerrillas, who pillaged the town and gathered booty, consisting of two hundred and fifty muskets, several hundred rounds of ammunition, ten thousand dollars in Missouri warrants, besides a large quantity of clothing, etc. The money was divided among the participating guerrillas, each of whom received nearly one thousand dollars in warrants besides clothing and other articles of value. The guerrillas compelled the landlord of the principal hotel to prepare them a good supper, to which they invited their prisoners, whom they paroled; and after feasting until 9 o'clock P. M., they withdrew to the cover of the forest.

After raiding Plattsburg, Quantrell broke camp and moved southward, passing through Independence, and bivouaced near Lee's Summit. The residents of that section suffered pitilessly from the sack and pillage of both Federals and Confederates. They occupied a middle ground which was subject to the incursions of both armies, and what was left after the forage of the Union forces was remorselessly

appropriated by the guerrillas. There were skirmishes almost daily, and every highway was red with human blood. The James boys, young as they were, became the terror of the border; the crack of their pistols or the whirr of their pirouetting bowies daily proclaimed the sacrifice of new victims. The sanguinary harvest grew broader as the sickle of death was thrust in to reap, and the little brooks and rivulets that had babbled merry music for ages and laved the thirst of man and beast with their crystal water, suddenly became tinged with a dye fresh from the fountain of bitterest sorrow. And thus the days sped on heavy with desolation. Quantrell and his followers were scarcely interrupted by the militia, who never attacked them except at the price of terrible defeat, until at length a direful scheme was proposed in which the desperate character of these free riders was manifested in its blackest hues.