TEXAS RANGER SERVICE ☆ ☆

A CHAPTER FROM THE MEMOIRS OF CAPTAIN "BILL" McDONALD, OF TEXAS.

By ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

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THE early history of Texas was written in blood and fire. Her counties preserve the names of her martyrs. Parker, Coleman, Crockett, Fannin, Travis, Bowie and a hundred others have the map for their monument; their names are given daily utterance by those for whom their deeds have little meaning.

In the beginning, after the Indian tribes—friendly at first—became hostile, the warfare was almost solely with the savages. For a full half-century every settler who built his campfire on the frontier did so at the risk of his property and his scalp. Those who established homes and settlements must have been a daring race indeed, for raids upon horses and herds were always imminent and massacres were as regular as the seasons.

The mother of Chief Quanah Parker (still living) for whom the town of Quanah, Tex., was named, was Cynthia Ann Parker, a little white girl captured by the Tehaucano Indians, during a raid on what was known as the Austin colony, in 1836. A brief story of that raid will serve as an example of a thousand others of a similar sort. The Austin colony settled in what is now Grimes county and consisted of something more than a score of persons, including women and children. The Indians who dwelt in the neighborhood seemed friendly enough until a small party of unknown settlers came along and attempted to steal their horses. Immediate trouble was the result and the loss of Tehaucano friendship for the entire settlement. When the reader considers what follows, I believe I shall be forgiven for hoping that those newcomers who stirred up the first trouble received the sort of a reward which only an Indian would know how to confer.

As the Austin colony consisted chiefly of the Parker family, a rude fortification which they erected was called Fort Parker, a name that to-day still suggests something of shuddering horror to those who have heard its history.

It was a fair May morning when that history was made. The early risers noticed that a body of restless Indians had collected within about 400 yards of the fort. A white flag was hoisted by the savages to signify their peaceable intentions and a warrior approached as if for conference. Benjamin Parker, commander of the fort, went out to meet him. He came back presently with the word that he believed the Indians intended to fight. He returned, however, to the hostile camp, where he was at once set upon and literally chopped to pieces by the savages, who then with wild yells and blood-curdling warwhoops charged on the fort. Some of the inmates had already left the stockade. Others were trying to escape. John Parker and wife and a Mrs Kellogg were overtaken a mile away. Parker was killed and scalped; his wife was spared and Mrs. Kellogg was made captive. Other members of the colony were butchered right and left and mutilated in the barbarous fashion which seems to give an Indian joy. Silas Parker was brutally killed and his two children, one of whom was the little girl, Cynthia Ann, were carried away. A Mrs. Plummer—daughter of Rev. James W. Parker—attempted to escape, carrying her little son in her arms. A huge painted savage, begrimed with dust and blood, overtook her, felled her with a hoe, and seizing her by the hair dragged her, still clinging to her child, back amid the butchery and torture of her friends. She and the others who were living were beaten with clubs and lashed with rawhide thongs. That night such of the captives as remained alive, and these included three children, were flung face down in the dust, their hands bound behind their backs, while the Indians, waving bloody scalps and shrieking, danced about them and beat them with their bows until the prisoners were strangling with their own blood. Later they took the infant child of Mrs. Plummer and slowly choked it before her eyes. When it was not quite dead they flung it again and again into the air and let it fall on the stones and earth. Then they tied a rope around its neck and threw its naked body into the hedges of prickly pear, from which they would jerk it fiercely with demoniacal yells. Finally they fastened the rope attached to its neck to the pommel of a saddle and rode round and round in a circle until the body of the child was literally in shreds. The poor fragments were then thrown into the mother's lap. For some reason the little girl, Cynthia Ann Parker, received better treatment, and lived. She grew up an Indian, forgot her own race and tongue, married a chief and became the mother of another chief, Quanah, surnamed Parker, to-day a friend of the white race.

It was the massacre of Fort Parker and events of a similar nature that resulted in the organization of the Texas Rangers. The Rangers were at first a semi-official body, locally enlisted and commanded, with regulations and duties not very clearly defined. Their purpose, however, was not in doubt. It was to defend life and property, and their chief qualifications were to be able to ride and shoot and stand up against the warfare of bloodthirsty savages.

"Exterminate the Indians" became a watchword in those days and the warfare that ensued and continued for 40 years can be compared with nothing in history unless it be with the fierce feuds of the ancient Scottish clans.

Early in 1836 Texas fought for and gained her independence, the only state in the Union to achieve such a triumph. In the following year the Texas congress recognized the Ranger movement and authorized several persons to raise Ranger companies to scour the country and annihilate marauding bands. Indians and low class Mexicans ("greasers") often consorted and the work, desperate and bloody, continued along the ever widening and westering frontier up to within a period easily remembered to-day by men not beyond middle age. Many names of those early Rangers have been preserved in Texas annals and in local song and traditions, and it would take as many volumes to recount their deeds.

As the years went by and the Indian was conquered or driven away, the Ranger's work changed, but his personality remained the same. The Ranger of 70 years ago is the Ranger of to-day—only his duties have altered. Long before the conquest of the savages a new element of disorder had entered the field. The desperado who had stirred up the first Indian troubles had survived and increased, to plunder his own race. The new and sparsely settled land invited every element of lawlessness and every refugee of crime. Local authorities would not or could not contend with them. It was for the Rangers, now much reduced in numbers, to solve the problem of destroying the disturber in their midst as they had driven the savage enemy from their frontiers. They were made peace officers and became a mounted constabulary, their duties being to quell disorders, to prevent crime and to bring criminals to justice. It was new work—less romantic than the wild Indian warfare of the frontier; work full of new dangers and what was still worse, it was work which, instead of inviting the encouragement and enthusiasm of a community, was of a sort to incur its displeasure, for the desperadoes of a neighborhood were either the heroes or the terrors of it and in either case to molest them was likely to prove unpopular. So it was, during this new order of things, that the Ranger service had to contend not only with the offenders but sometimes with the very people whom they were hoping to protect. This made the work hard and discouraging, as work always is hard and discouraging when it is done amid enemies who wear the guise of friends.

For this kind of service Capt. Bill McDonald was eminently qualified. Already he had been appointed a special Ranger in Company B, commanded by Capt. S. A. McMurray, but his duties as U. S. deputy marshal in No-Man's Land and in the Cherokee strip had been his chief work. Nevertheless he had, on occasion, engaged in bandit hunting in his own state, during this period, either alone or in company with other officials, usually with good results.

Events of this sort kept Bill McDonald's name fresh in the Texans' minds and made him seem peculiarly eligible for regular service. The resignation of Capt. S. A. McMurray, who had long and bravely commanded Company B, became his opportunity and he hurried to Austin to try for that command.

His old friend, James Hogg, was now governor of the state. Since the settlement of their differences so long before there had been no discord of any kind and each had admired the other's career, proud to remember the friendship. Arriving at the capital now, McDonald was shown in to the governor's room. Greeting him, he said:

"Well, I hardly know what to call you, since you got to be governor. I don't know whether to call you 'Jim' or 'Mister.' I'll have to call you 'Governor,' I guess, as I want to get a place."

They shook hands cordially. Gov. Hogg said:

"What is it, Bill? What can I do for you?"

"Why," said McDonald, "I came down to get to be Ranger captain—to take McMurray's place in Company B."

Hogg looked at him reprovingly.

"Why didn't you let me know sooner?" he said. "There are two other applications for the place, both from good men, with long petitions and fine indorsements."

The applicant for position forgot his old friend's title.

"Why, Jam, I never thought of it until a day or two ago. I didn't have time to get indorsements, but I can get 'em, if you want them. I have been working mostly in No-Man's Land and the Territory lately, but have done work in Texas too, and I can get about any kind of indorsement you want."

Hogg laughed. He had a robust sense of humor.

"That's all right, Bill," he said; "you have already got the best indorsement I ever saw."

McDonald looked puzzled.

"I don't understand," he said, "I didn't know anybody knew I wanted the place."

"All the same you have got the indorsements," insisted Hogg.

He turned to his desk and got out a bundle of letters.

"Look over these," he said. "You probably know some of the writers."

McDonald took the letters and read them one after another. They were from well-known criminals, their lawyers, their friends and their associates. They had been received by Hogg while he was attorney general and each was a protest and a complaint against McDonald, declaring him to be a ruthless and tyrannical official, whose chief recreation was hounding good citizens for the sake of revenge or glory, and adding that it was not unusual for him to put the said citizens in jail or in box cars, declaring further that he sometimes hitched them to posts with chains and that he was a menace to legitimate settlement and society in general.

McDonald looked over some of these documents and grinned.

"That's so, Jim," he said, "I do put 'em in box cars when there ain't a jail; the way I used to do back in Mineola—you recollect, when the jail was full—and I lariat 'em out with a chain and a post when there ain't a box car handy; but I don't reckon they're innocent none."

Hogg nodded.

"Those indorsements are good enough for me," he said. "They carry the flavor of conviction. I appoint you Ranger captain on the strength of them."

McDonald returned to Quanah with his appointment as captain of "Company B, Frontier battalion." The headquarters of the company were then at Amarillo, in the southern part of Potter county, near the Randall county line. This was almost the exact center of the Panhandle and in a locality sparsely settled, untamed and lawless.

Since the early days of "Ranging" there had not been much change in Ranger regulations and equipment. The character of the work, however, had changed and the force had been reduced in numbers. Company B now consisted of only eight members all told. These were supposed to range over all that vast section known as the Panhandle and were subject to orders that might take them to any other portion of the state where their assistance was needed.

It was in January, 1891, that Bill McDonald received his appointment as Ranger captain and his first official service was not long delayed. He arrived at Amarillo about midnight and was received with congratulations, for the news had traveled ahead of him. He was tired, however, and the hour was late, so he presently slipped away to bed. He had hardly fallen asleep when he was rudely awakened and handed a telegram which stated that the Indians had made a raid across the border and were killing and robbing in Hall county, near Salisbury.

Capt. McDonald read the telegram and laughed. There had been no Indian troubles in Texas for a number of years. White renegades there were in plenty, but Indian outbreaks had long since ceased.

"I guess the boys are trying to have some fun with me on my first night," he said, and turned in once more to sleep. But a few minutes later another telegram came; and another; this time from the superintendent of the railroad company—a Mr. Good, whom McDonald knew as a man not given to practical joking.

The Ranger captain dressed himself, hurried over to the telegraph office and got the operator there to talk over the wire to the operator where the scare had originated. He learned that it seemed to be genuine and that everybody was leaving the neighborhood.

Still Capt. Bill could not believe it a genuine Indian incursion. Hall county was in the second tier from the Territory line and the Indians would have had to cross Childress county to get to it. He did not believe that they would undertake to do this or that they could have undertaken it without previous alarms. Still it was his duty to investigate. He got a special train, loaded in men, horses and pack mules, and set out on a hunt for Indians. It was about a hundred miles to Salisbury and they reached there early in the day. Not a soul was in sight anywhere. The inhabitants were hidden, some in dugouts, some in haystacks, some in the tall grass. Here and there, as the train pulled in, McDonald saw a head stick out from a sod house far out on the prairie, then suddenly disappear, like a prairie dog dropping into his hole. He set out to interview some of these wary settlers and learned that the Indian alarm had been given by a man—a new settler just arrived in the country—who had ridden his horse to death and lost one of his children—having left him far behind somewhere—in his wild eagerness to escape the savages who, he declared, were burning and scalping not far away. Capt. Bill found this man and after a little talk with him was convinced that what he had seen was nothing more nor less than some cowboys on a round-up, disporting themselves around their campfire at night, as cowboys will—dancing and capering in the mad manner of young plainsmen whose ideas of amusement are elemental and whose opportunities for social diversions are few. The man and the neighborhood remained unconvinced, so it was decided to visit the scene of the disturbance.

Horses, men and pack mules unloaded themselves from the freight car and went racing over the prairie, the pack mules, as usual, plunging and braying with tail in air, their tinware clattering in a manner calculated to put a whole tribe of Indians into a panic and send them capering across the eastern horizon into their own domain. But there were no Indians. It was as Capt. Bill had thought; a gang of cowboys, the night before, had rounded up some cattle, killed a beef, carried it to their camp nearby, where they had built a great fire and roasted it, doing a wild war dance of celebration and shooting off their six-shooters in their prodigal expression of joy. Viewed from a little distance, through a sort of mirage condition which had exaggerated the whole effect, the scene to the newcomers was a horrifying picture of savages about a burning home, with the inhabitants fleeing for their lives.

The man who had just moved in had stampeded for his own safety and started a general alarm, which did not subside even when the cowboys themselves came in and testified to the truth. The panic spread throughout that section of the country and other reports of Indian outbreaks were circulated, becoming magnified until it was believed that the Indians had broken out and were making a general raid on the Panhandle. The inhabitants of one town, south of Amarillo, threw up breastworks, got behind them, and put out pickets in preparation for the arrival of the Indians. Every man seen loping across the prairie was reported as an Indian, and all this happened as late as 1891, when there had been no Indian outbreaks for years and when there was scarcely a possibility of anything of the sort. It was a big joke, of course, afterward, but it seemed no joke at the time and it was Bill McDonald's initiation as captain.

Knew Nothing of Worry

John Ruskin Always Shielded from Care by Virtue of His Financial Situation.

Ruskin was an only son; and from the very first, the firm character of his parents in a certain sense overshadowed him. In all material things his life was a sheltered one—what the French call capitonne. He was never forced to go out into the world and battle for a living. Her father's large fortune was always at his command; and as his father was convinced that the boy was an extraordinary genius, he never stinted him or denied him anything. Therefore young Ruskin was free from ordinary cares. He could gratify his taste for art, buy pictures, endow museums, acts as his own publisher; or, if he liked, he could fight over immaterial questions without ever having to think about the question of an income.

Even after his parents died, and when Ruskin, after middle life, had practically thrown away the fortune which had been left him, he still received an income of some $20,000 a year from his copyrights, so that never once did he know the meaning of poverty, or what it is to toil for money.

All this gave his genius full play. His eccentricities, so to speak, were endowed. Had he been less pampered, he would have been a very different man in every way. Perhaps it was a good thing for him and for the world that his circumstances were as I have described them; but, on the other hand he lacked that hard experience which makes men really strong. Even physically, this may perhaps have injured him.

To the world at large he seemed a radical reformer, attacking the whole commercial system of modern life, and hurling epithets that flamed like balefires over social questions. But at home—and he lived with his father and mother during the whole formative period of his life—he seemed more of a child than a grown man. He submitted to the dictation of his parents in everything domestic. When he was 40 years of age, he used to cover up all his cherished paintings on Sunday, because his mother did not approve of anything that would please the fleshly eye and distract the mind from spiritual meditation.—Lyndon Orr, in Munsey's.

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