

DAVID ANDERSON PIONEER HUSTLER AND EMPIRE BUILDER

Adventurous Career of a Man Who Heard the Call of the West More Than Half a Century Ago and Has Since Lived Amid the Stirring Events of An Empire's Development

LIVES there a man in Nebraska with a wider range of experience than "Uncle Dave" Anderson, pioneer of two states, hero of a hundred episodes, far-sighted and energetic man of business and today a hearty, 76-year-old citizen of South Omaha? "Truth is stronger than fiction," is a hackneyed expression, but it must be drafted into use here to indicate the romance of David Anderson's life. Born amid the peaceful valleys of Pennsylvania, he was destined to come in contact with the most profound human misery and to witness through years the most glaring human vice, the most reckless human lawlessness. A hundred times he ventured into the jaws of death. Through it all he carried lofty ideals and retained his high integrity. Without further prologue the curtain rises on this drama.

The facts that he was born in a log cabin on the banks of the Brandywine, Chester county, Pennsylvania, in 1832; that his grandfather fought in the revolution under General "Mad Anthony" Wayne and his father in the war of 1812 under General Jackson, must be passed over quickly. Young Anderson left the farm at the age of 15, went to Philadelphia and was apprenticed to a painter. A few weeks after he arrived there he was attacked by the small-pox and was sick for weeks. In 1849 he lived in Philadelphia through all the horrors of the plague. Had there been a Carnegie medal at that time he would certainly have merited it. Though but a boy of 17, he devoted all his time to caring for the sick and dying. The city was in an uproar. Parents deserted their children and children their parents when they found they had the mark of the great White Death upon their brows.

"All night we could hear the cry, 'Bring out your dead; bring out your dead!' in ghostly monotone," says Mr. Anderson. "I took care of one woman and her three children, all sick. Her husband had left them when he saw their plight. I devoted myself to this work night and day for three weeks. When it was over I went back to work, but was attacked by the awful malady a few days later. I took it coolly and pulled through. Many died of mere fright."

As early as 1854 Mr. Anderson first turned his attention to the west. His travels led him as far as the Mississippi. In December of that year he married Miss Mary E. Deaver in Natchez, Miss. She was the brave companion of many of his later adventures. His first venture into the real trackless wilderness of the west was in 1858, when with ten other young men he started in a mule wagon from Philadelphia. They took a boat at Cincinnati and went down the Ohio river. One of the incidents of the trip which Mr. Anderson recalls is stopping at Louisville, where they paid a visit to the "Kentucky Giant," who kept a hotel there. This man was 7 feet, 8 inches tall. He greeted them cordially. "His boots looked like small mud scows and his walking stick was four and a half feet long," says Mr. Anderson.

Out On the Great Desert

At Kansas City the adventurers disembarked, purchased wagons and proceeded to the west by the overland trail. At Junction City they entered a great desert, where no water was. Mr. Anderson recalls with vivid picture their passage over this dreary country. Twice they were on the verge of dying of thirst. With parched throats and swollen tongues they were pushing on in the face of a scorching wind, when a big mastiff that accompanied them stopped at the foot of a mound, gave a long howl and pawed the earth. A dozen men seized picks and shovels and at a depth of ten feet cold, clear water in abundance was found. Shortly after this they descried a lone figure advancing toward them from the west. It swayed from side to side like a drunkard. As it came nearer they saw it was a white man, clad in rough clothes, clumsily made from bed ticking. He talked incoherently and pointed maudlinly to the west. They gave him water and food, and when he came to himself he bade him good-bye as he disappeared toward the east. He lingered in their minds in after years like a herald of all the disappointed legions that were to come out of that country.

Space does not permit to relate the adventures of this trip, which took fifty-two days. They had several fights with Indians, and they were overtaken by a hurricane. On May 6 they sighted the snow-capped peaks of the El Dorado, to which they were bound, and a few days later they pulled into Denver.

"Denver at that time consisted of six houses, including Denver hall," says Mr. Anderson. "The latter had an earthen floor, cotton-wood gambling tables, stools and bar. It was the forerunner of 100 such halls which were to appear there within a few months. This humble place was the temporary stopping place of Horace Greeley, the great editor of the New York Tribune. He had passed us a few days before in the stagecoach. I asked for and obtained an interview with him in a little room adjoining the bar. He had just returned from Gregory, the mining camp, and on the way his mule had thrown him over its head. I remember he wore the same old white hat, or its lineal descendant, in which I had seen him years before in Philadelphia. He was enthusiastic about the mountain country, though I think the mines had been 'salted' for his benefit during this visit."

"The population of Denver at that time consisted of all classes of men—scholars, authors, correspondents, bull whackers, miners, builders, professional men, capitalists and blacklegs. The latter came to be in the majority. The first day I was there I witnessed a bowie knife performance, in which Bill Foster and a Mexican amused themselves and a noisy crowd by cutting and gashing each other in a frightful manner."

First Women in Denver

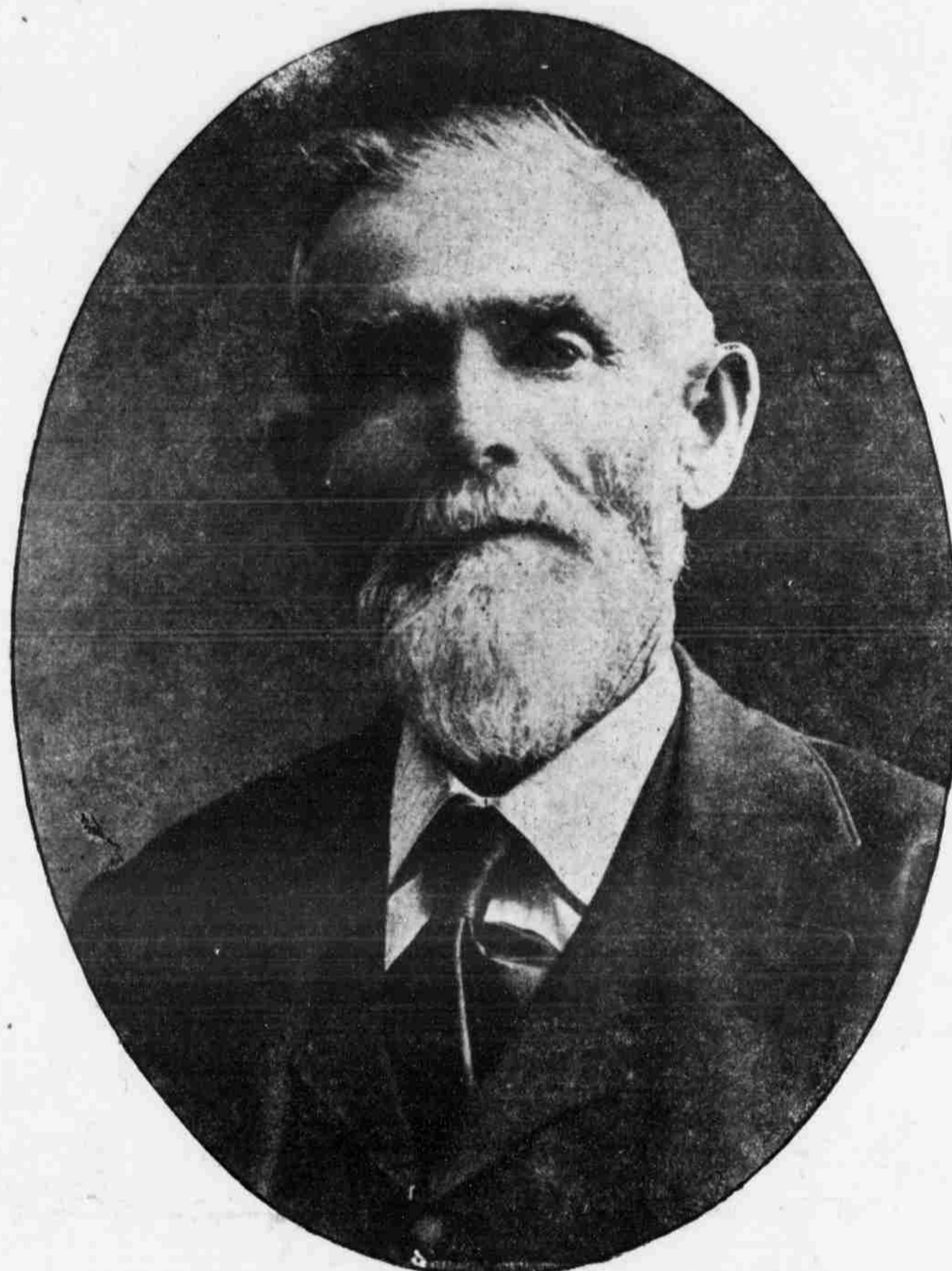
Three women had accompanied the ten Pennsylvania adventurers across the plains. They were the first women in Denver and their presence there called forth a chivalrous demonstration, in which the roughest joined. They halted the wagons in Blake street and called repeatedly for Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Chestnut and Mrs. Turpin. The women were abashed and could scarcely be persuaded by their husbands to pass the ordeal. Cheer on cheer came from the throats of that motley group, consisting of real gentlemen, dirty, bearded miners, bandbox dandies, thimble riggers, monte cappers, old mountain hunters in buckskin, bull whackers, swinging their goads, Indian half-breeds and Mexican greasers. All were reminded of mother, wife, sister or sweetheart, and for a time the presence of women made them forget their baser instincts.

Proceeding to Golden City, the adventurers came to the real mountains. Here the wagons were taken apart. To the axle of the front wheel two sacks of flour and three hams were securely strapped. Then to these wheels eleven yoke of oxen were hitched and the ascent of the mountain began. All the long, sultry day they climbed the steep parched land with broken wagons and carcasses of men and cattle. Death lurked in 100 places. It took two days to attain the summit. Two years later Mr. Anderson discovered, explored and opened a route through the canon which did away with the necessity of climbing this mountain.

He took up a number of claims in this region, but, being a man of energy and practical achievement, he turned his energies to the development of the country rather than to digging treasure out of the ground. He secured the right to carry the mails from Denver to the surrounding mining camps. He called the enterprise the "Colorado Pony Express." His route lay through Virginia gulch, and there one dark night he was set on by robbers. Fortunately his "mink skin" contained only \$40 that night and the highwaymen left him his letters. For these he received 25 cents each.

"My arrival at the camps was the event of the week," he relates. "All business stopped and the men came running. I have seen great, strong men turn away and weep like children when they found there were no letters for them, so great was the longing for word from the dear ones far away in the east."

Tri-weekly coaches had been established from Denver to the camps. The fare was 11 cents a mile. Into this little money-earning



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bonanza stepped the Overland company with daily coaches. Passenger fares dropped, dropped, dropped, until they reached zero. Then the Overland company offered a sumptuous dinner at the Grey house as an inducement for passengers and the Mail company countered by offering a cash premium. Eventually the Mail company was forced out of business.

Criminals in Control

A dozen tragedies were witnessed by the intrepid young Pennsylvanian in that wild country. He helped cut down more than one hapless fellow who had met summary justice at the end of a rope. Murder became so frequent and common in Denver that it was little more than a joke. "Another man for breakfast," people would say with a laugh over their morning meal. "Every second door was a saloon," says Mr. Anderson, "and the enchantress, with her lascivious attire and seductive smile, was not slow in arriving and establishing herself in this seething inferno. Secret oath-bound societies for the protection of criminals and desperadoes were organized. There was a Horse Stealers' league. John Shearer, proprietor of the Jefferson house, was secretary of this remarkable organization. He 'stretched hemp' with the strong hands of the vigilantes at the other end of the rope. From papers in his pos-

session it was found that John Ford, a lawyer, was president of the gang. He was to start from Denver to Leavenworth the following morning to defend his friend and accomplice, the murderer, Jim Gordon. When the stage arrived at Coal creek, twelve miles from Denver, a squad of horsemen, masked and armed, met it, took John Ford out and up a dry ravine. The Horse Stealers' league had to elect a new president, for Ford was never seen again."

An amusing incident was the first marriage in Colorado, which Mr. Anderson witnessed.

"I had just come up from Denver to Golden City. My host there, Judge Borton, invited me to go with him to the wedding. He had never had occasion to use the marriage ceremony, and, being somewhat embarrassed, he ordered the timid and bashful pair to arise and hold up their right hands. When they had assumed this position the judge solemnly began, 'Do you and each of you solemnly swear that you will true answers make to such questions as shall be put to you touching your competence to serve as'—but here a titter from the guests apprised the judge that he had made a mistake, and he quickly switched to the right track. But the ceremony ended ludicrously, anyway. When it was concluded, and as the judge was about to place the customary salutation on the lips of the bride, one of two horses which had been fighting

outside kicked at the other, struck the mud and drove a great ball of it through the window and upon the faces of both judge and bride."

The famous frontiersman and scout, Kit Carson, became a friend of Mr. Anderson in July, 1860, when they met in Denver. Mr. Anderson remembers him as a short, heavy-set man, with hair somewhat streaked with gray. He was an accomplished storyteller. Mr. Anderson was a member of the Colorado territorial legislature.

Traveling Companions in Early Days

In the fall of 1859 Mr. Anderson was compelled to make a trip to the east, which he did by coach. On the way he met three traveling companions, whose names were known throughout the nation. The first of these came aboard at Julesburg. It was no less a personage than Joseph Smith, head of the Mormon church. The second was Artemus Ward, the humorist. The third was William H. Cooper, delegate from Utah to congress. They traveled together in the stage to Omaha. In the winter of 1859 Mr. Anderson made a trip from Omaha to Denver with a load of butter and honey. He was entirely alone, with no companion but his mules and his faithful dog, Jack. The Cheyenne Indians were on the warpath, and he found many of the ranches burned and some of the keepers murdered. He went through the trip unharmed and sold his honey in Denver at 60 cents a pound and his butter at 75 cents.

A most remarkable trip was that which he made from Denver to Omaha in 1861. Just as he was leaving, a miner asked him to take his wife and three children along that they might return to their friends in New Jersey. At first Mr. Anderson refused, but finally he yielded. A beautiful summer afternoon it was when they left Denver, but within six hours a terrific blizzard came up. One of the mules gave out and refused to go further. Mr. Anderson unhitched the animal, and, throwing himself into the harness, toiled along beside the other mule for hours through the snow. After midnight he reached the ranchhouse. He believes superhuman strength was vouchsafed to him for this contingency. He reached Omaha safely with his charges.

Here he met his wife and children and started with them for the west. Rains overtook them and they were two weeks in going from Omaha to Fremont. He decided to give up the far west and took a ranch in the Platte valley, eight miles east of Columbus. The second day after he located there his neighbor's boys shot a Pawnee Indian for stealing wheat. Half the Pawnee nation appeared at the ranch to demand reparation. Mr. Anderson leaped to a pony, hurried to Columbus and summoned men. With their appearance an amnesty was brought about. A present of five sacks of flour and a yearling colt was made to the redmen in exchange for the life of their late lamented brother.

During Grasshopper Days

During sixteen years on this homestead Mr. Anderson raised six crops. In the summer of 1866 he had to make a trip to Fort Kearney. While there an odd-looking mist arose in the west. It came on with incredible rapidity and developed into grasshoppers. All along that route he flew like Paul Revere, giving the alarm. Some built fires around their cornfields, but the invading insects smothered the flames with their bodies. The destruction was complete.

Since leaving the ranch in 1876 Mr. Anderson's life has been exceedingly busy. He went to Columbus and engaged in live stock shipping. There he established one of the best stock markets in Nebraska, and during the ten years he operated it he had stock on the rail every twenty-four hours between Nebraska and Chicago. When the Magic city of South Omaha was founded he turned his attention in that direction, and in 1886 moved thither with his family. He immediately took an active interest in local affairs. He helped organize the first republican club and was its first president. He helped organize the board of trade in 1887. He assisted in organizing the South Omaha Loan and Building association, and was a director for seven years. He proposed and helped organize the South Omaha Heat, Light and Power company and served as director six years. He erected eighteen buildings in the city and took a lively interest in every public improvement. As chairman of the committee of the board of trade, he was largely responsible for securing the government appropriation for the postoffice building there. He originated the movement for the new city hall, now nearly completed, at a cost of \$70,000.

In 1903 he organized the Taxpayers' league of South Omaha, which brought about several reforms. As president of this league he suggested the formation of a fire and police board and also suggested the new public school law. The passage of these laws by the legislature brought about a great moral, social and political reform in South Omaha.

Four children were born to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, of whom two are living. They are Mrs. Laura Fenner and Mrs. W. S. Cook of Omaha. The grandchildren are Harry J. Fenner, who has been with the Swift Packing company for seventeen years; Fred Lightfoot, holding a responsible position in the Lincoln stock yards; Walter Fenner, who is on the theatrical stage, with the Hickman company atavenport, Ia.; Frank Lightfoot, who is seeking his fortune in the Klondyke; Mrs. Hazel Graves of Omaha and Mrs. Martin Cahill of Ogden, Utah. There is also one great grandchild—Anderson Cahill of Ogden.

Enjoys Evening of Life

In his comfortable home at Twenty-fifth and M streets, South Omaha, Mr. Anderson lives today, with his wife, enjoying the fruits of a well-spent life. It has been a full life and it is a life of which Mr. Anderson is proud. He has traversed every state and territory of this country and has been in many of the Latin countries. He was lost in the swamps of Mississippi and the forests of Minnesota; he has scaled the rugged and ponderous Alleghenies, the Rockies and the Sierra Nevadas and has looked down through the clouds from the loftiest peak of the White mountains; he has known men and seen life of all kinds; he was a member of the first national republican convention convened in Philadelphia in 1856 and has seen every president since Andrew Jackson; he has listened to speeches by Clay, Calhoun, Webster, Buchanan, Owen Lovejoy, Greeley and scores of other celebrities and has had a personal acquaintance with many of the great men of the land.

Mr. and Mrs. Anderson celebrated their golden wedding December 12, 1904, in the Ancient Order of United Workmen hall, South Omaha. More than 600 were present, including ex-Governor Boyd, Edward Rosewater, John B. Furay and many other leaders in affairs. Mr. Anderson declares he cannot bestow praise enough on the wife who has so loyally and faithfully stood by him through more than half a century of life, enduring the vicissitudes and privations of the frontier and performing her duties as wife and mother, calmly, courageously.

Age has no sting for a man like Uncle Dave. His physical and mental faculties are unimpaired. He conducts his prosperous real estate and loan business, and during his spare time is writing a book recounting his experiences. He has a wonderful power of expression and remarkable memory which holds names, dates and details as vividly as though they had occurred only yesterday. Though he has gone through three terrible plagues—smallpox, cholera and yellow fever—he is today untroubled by any ill. He is proud of the fact that he has never smoked, chewed or drunk, and declares that any person should be able to live to be 90 or 100 years of age, provided—and "Uncle Dave's eyes twinkle—provided he starts in at 10 years of age with that object in view and abstains from all the vices, and practices all the virtues that man should.

Moonshine and Mountain Dew

MOONSHINERS, heroes of song and story and the stage, are about to pass into the great unknown. The death-knell of this once prosperous but illicit business of making "mountain dew" has been sounded by public opinion, according to David A. Gates, chief of the internal revenue agents of the Treasury department. Today throughout the entire moonshining district of the southern states there are not ten legalized saloons. The stamp of public opinion, so clearly written within the law, is about to make its indelible impress on the hidden still without the law. It is the judgment of the men who have taken their lives in their hands in the fastnesses of the mountains to face these criminals that the real solution of their difficulties is at hand.

There has never been a more attractive personality to the writer of fiction or the author of melodrama than the rugged moonshiner, living on the craggy mountainside, with his primitive still hidden far back in the underbrush. He has invariably been made an object for the admiration and sympathy of those who came in contact with him through these mediums. A professor of the University of Chicago once said that the Cumberland mountain region of Kentucky and Tennessee, where the moonshiner abounds, afforded one of the most fertile fields for the truthful portrayal of real Americanism, descendants of Scotch-Irish parentage of early deep religious convictions, singing garbled ballads of the old Scottish border, and relating traditional legends from Erin's isle. Here sprang the heroes of King's mountain, and here the federal government found its sole solace

among the southern states in the days of the civil war.

Perhaps the first moonshiners in the United States were those who fomented the whisky rebellion in western Pennsylvania in the first administration of President Washington. This rebellion was broken only after the use of federal troops. There never has been since occasion to use an entire army for the suppression of the moonshiners, but armed revenue officers have never ceased to patrol the lone mountain trails in search of illicit stills, nor have they succeeded in overcoming that dogged resistance to the internal revenue laws which came about through the eternal belief in nearly all moonshining localities that what is right for the father is right for the son. The feudists in Kentucky have, in many instances, been numbered among the ranks of the moonshiners, and they have won for themselves the reputation among revenue officers of being the fairest and most dangerous of all moonshiners. They have at times evinced such a high regard for the enforcement of the internal revenue law that they have been found enlisted under the revenue banner, gun in hand, for the sole purpose of slaying lawfully their enemies.

Those who have gone forth to fight the battle of the revenue law among the moonshiners of Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee, the "wildcatters" of the Sand mountain districts of Alabama and the blockaders of South Carolina and Georgia, know them all to be of one characteristic. Only when forced to fight in the open does the ordinary moonshiner, by whatever name he may be known, do so. This "hero" finds his favorite fighting ground behind a favorite

rock or tree which he has gained preferably without the knowledge of his victim. Since 1876, when the revenue officers began their work among them, fifty-four of these agents of the government have been killed and ninety-four wounded, many of whom never saw the man who fired the shot. This does not include marshals and deputy marshals who were killed in making arrests. No instance is known of a revenue agent being taken prisoner by moonshiners, the favorite method of the latter being to slay and have the matter quickly over with. John Carver, a posse man, killed in a raid in the Smoky mountain district, along the border line of Tennessee and North Carolina, in 1904, was the last revenue officer to give up his life in the fight against moonshiners. The government keeps no record of moonshiners killed.

Within the last five years the prohibition question has been one of the most vital issues in southern politics. It is admitted by southern politicians that the negro question is at the bottom of the prohibition question, the theory being that the criminal class among the negro race as a whole is a practically uncontrollable element where whisky is permitted. The growth of this belief has led the southern people to take drastic action with relation to whisky. It was the issue in Tennessee last fall and Tennessee went "dry." It was an issue before the recent session of the Georgia legislature and dry legislation was enacted by that body in response to the demands of the Georgia people. This growth of public sentiment has its strongholds in the mountain districts of all the southern states.

As stated above, the most notorious (Continued on Page Two)