

THE
LIFE AND CONFESSION
OF
NEAL BALLINGALL,
WHO WAS
CONVICTED OF COUNTERFEITING,
AND SENTENCED
TO THE
KENTUCKY PENITENTIARY
FOR
EIGHT YEARS.

FLEMING COUNTY, KENTUCKY, 1855.

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The Confession of Neal Ballingall.

I will now give a full history of my life, and in doing which I shall be compelled to implicate those connected with me, and who continue in the band from which I am now separated.

I was born in Nicholas county, Kentucky, at Ballingalls' Mills, now known as Mitchell's Mills, the 8th day of November, 1803. I am the son of David Ballingall. I have a distinct recollection of all the incidents of my life from an early age. I hope the community will hear me patiently while I speak candidly, for I shall soon pay the debt of all the earth, and then give an account to God. I am induced to make these disclosures from the fact that the great band to which I stood identified forsook me when I needed help. Our organization was not deficient, it is not yet deficient; we, perhaps, number with any organization or fraternity in the land. Those influences were thrown around me young; step by step I progressed until I became a monster workman. My father moved from the mills above named to the lower Bluelicks when I was five years old. The first incident of my life was riding down to the river—the

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horses fell down in the river and spoiled my clothes, and as I was fearful of punishment from my mother, I got on a slab and floated down the river some distance and there concealed myself in a hay loft. They found me late at night, but did not punish me. From that time till I was sixteen, I worked hard for my father, during which time, he and my only brother, David, was gambling with the means I earned. I determined and made it known to my father that I would work no more for him. He wanted me to help build a certain house and he would set me loose. Now in my seventeenth year, I began to contract business for myself, and went to Maysville with Sam'l Caldwell and James McClanahan. They hired me to lead their horses home for the sum of two dollars each. This was the first money I got for myself; with that I bought a lottery ticket of Rine Robinson and drew a pair of saddle pockets and traded them for a colt, which on trial proved to be a race nag. Here my experience as a gambler commenced; I won some three hundred dollars, and my desire for this vice began to increase, which I regard as an introduction to what I am now made to realize in this lonely cell, separated from my dear wife and children; but justice to my country demands that I must suffer.

I was successful with my filly. The first bet I made was ten dollars, then fifty, and so on. I then bought a small drove of horses, drove them to Augusta, Ga., made some money, but made more money

playing cards than I did on my horses. I returned home with about fifteen hundred dollars.

Here was the unfortunate period in my history. King Bill McCord, of Kentucky, was with me in Georgia, having horses also. My brother was clerking for him in the store, and when we came home my brother purchased McCord's store and desired me to take an interest with him. I done so. Here I became acquainted with counterfeit money. Geo. W. Riddle, of Kentucky, and my brother obtained from Cincinnati, or elsewhere, a lever for making counterfeit silver, and desired to occupy the back room of our store. I would not give my consent for it to be used in any such way, and reasoned upon the consequences that might grow out of such a course, not being initiated into the great school of counterfeiters. Finally I consented.

W. J. Williams, my half brother, proposed to me to go on to the head of Sandy, where Sprinkle was operating to perfection. We accordingly went, and when we arrived at the pure mint and fountain head of all counterfeit silver, we made an agreement with Sprinkle for some of this money. I paid Sprinkle \$100 00 for so much, to be delivered at such a time. Before the money came I had engagements in Georgia, consequently, while I was gone the money was brought, by a man of the name of Witty, who paid the money to David Ballingall. He divided with John McCarty and Williams, who used the money before I got home and never accounted to me for any

of the same. I bought, on my return home fifteen hundred dollars counterfeit money, let John McCarty have it on commission, who was to give me half he made. I then sold my horse and buggy to a man by the name of Johnson, at Bob Rain's, in Fairview. The buggy was taken there by a man by the name of Thogmartin. The amount was seventeen hundred dollars, counterfeit.

John McCarty received the money, and he and his brother bought stone-coal with it, paying out every dollar. One twenty dollar bill came back on us. John McCarty bought a farm with the same kind of money.

The reader will see that I dealt exclusively in this coin; this I confess; and for this must suffer, separated from my family, where we have plenty of this world's goods. I have a quantity of good land and servants to till it, but I cannot be there. I pray that my sons may not take pattern after the examples set them by their unfortunate father who ought to have lived for their protection, but instead of that they are left with a lone widowed mother to discharge the duties of both; in training them in the way they should go. O, that I could call my time back! When I remember the pleasant hours that once I felt in the bosom of my family, an affectionate wife and devoted children that looked to me for succor and protection, as their best friend in life—how painful the thought that I can be with them no more forever. I shall soon leave the world I know;

if I am separated from the awful cup in the State prison they will soon have me to bury. O, that I had died before I contracted such cruel habits; had it not been for intemperance it would not have been my fate. Step by step have I yielded to the suggestions of the great enemies of man; drinking, counterfeiting and gambling. For this is their position in the history of crimes. I therefore can only expect the reward of the wicked; "The wages of sin is death."

The same laws that I have offended and for which sentence has been justly past, requiring that I shall pay the penalty by my own personal suffering, while my beloved family must in their innocence also suffer, recognize and approve the production and manufacture of the very article and means that has brought me to this unfortunate end.

I therefore call upon you as holding the executive power. Think of your inconsistency and no longer authorize the manufacture of an article that tends to lead men to their execution.

I desire that a better influence may be thrown around my children than I have done, that they may shun the vices to which I have become a victim.

I shall now resume my subject, as it was my only motive in making this pamphlet to give the history of my life, and some of the movements of that great party to which I am connected, or have been, I mean the counterfeiters of Fleming and Nicholas, and of the State of Kentucky. They are a cage of unclean

birds, and will not do to rely on. I have been caught, though I have not at any time passed any of the money; I have preferred buying and selling it, and they have stood by and saw me suffer, and some of them have sworn falsely to criminate me. They are a much stronger party than a great many people suppose, and more unsuspected men of high rank moving in the first circles of society.

I am aware of that excited state that will and must necessarily exist toward me in the development of these truths. Some, however, may say that as I was convicted my statements are worth nothing; I shall make these statements, nevertheless; you may believe or disbelieve them, you will see some of them tremble when they see their names on the record. They are scattered up and down the earth.

I fell in with them at an early age, at Lower Lick; at that time there was as many gamblers, counterfeiters and so on there as any other place, perhaps. I began horse-racing there, and united with them and covenanted together, to suffer ourselves to be beat at nothing. If a stranger fell in with us, he fell among strangers, and his money we never failed to obtain, for if we could not succeed by fair means we always adopted other means; so I became a perfect card player and studied it as a science. I went to Maysville for the purpose of running a sorrel horse at the races. Thos. Marshal, of Louis county was there, he made a bet on my horse, which beat the other, a brag horse. This gave me great encouragement to

continue. I was married at the age of twenty-four. The first time I saw my wife, she was at a ball, at McClanahan's. Her name was Louisa Fielder; daughter of George Fielder. Some six years after that we were married. When I proposed to marry her, she said not, of course, as a prudent girl would, and her father opposed my marrying his daughter, I being a wild, gambling boy. She was rich, and I worked hard to accomplish my object. Her father finally consented, and called for the license himself; but after we were married her father gave us nothing. I was proud, and determined to have money for her to live upon. About six weeks after we were married, I put up a heifer to be shot for, and a dispute arising between myself and a man by the name of Harrington, he gave me the d—d lie and shook his fist in my face, when I stabbed him with the intent to kill him, but did not do it. On that trial Willis C. Rodgers swore falsely, as was proven by Aris Throgmorton and John B. McLord, which saved me from the Penitentiary, Rodgers being a man of good standing. Then my wife complained for the first time, and plead with me to quit playing cards. Had I taken her advice I would now have been a happy man and would not now be confined in this lonely cell. Husbands ought in such cases to be advised by their wives who seek their happiness. I staid with my father, and paid our board as others did, and worked hard on ground that I had rented from Robert Pain. My father-in-law sent his son, Sam Field-

er to me, requesting me to come and live upon his farm; but the old man and me could not agree. He insulted me and told me to leave. I could not bear that, so I cursed him and left and went there no more. There I was wrong, I candidly confess. He has since, through Sam, offered to be my friend.

By this time, by working and gambling, I had procured enough money to make a trip with King Bill McLord with horses to Georgia, my brother remaining to clerk for him in the store. On my return home having fifteen hundred dollars, my brother and myself bought the store, and assumed the debts of McCord in favor of Armstrong and others. The next year Moses Hopkins, George W. Riddle and David Ballingall went to Cincinnati and there bought a lever for the purpose of making counterfeit silver, having previously made an arrangement with Sprinkle and a man by the name of Witty to make money with this lever. They wanted to occupy the back room of the store, but I told them it would not do, and refused, but proposed to furnish the money to buy it.

Wm. J. Williams, a half-brother of mine, who is now dead, and myself started to Sandy to see Sprinkle, and make the arrangements. We passed through Flemingsburg about daylight, and went on about three miles, where we stopped to breakfast. After breakfast we went on a short distance to the forks of the road, where there was a stick setting against the sign post; and my brother, remarking that it was all

right, rapped the post a time or two, when a man came out of the woods who called himself Witty. We went on to Sprinkle's, and I paid him good money for so much counterfeit, which was to be brought on soon after, and we returned home. I then started for Georgia with a lot of stock, and while I was gone the money was brought and paid to Williams. He divided it with David Ballingall and John McCarty, and when I returned the money was spent, and I lost all that I had paid out.

I then paid \$120,00 to Williams or my brother, I do not distinctly remember which, to buy counterfeit money, not being satisfied yet. I started then for Georgia, and they continued to swindle me, telling me they had put it out on commission. I here determined to dissolve; and finding myself minus \$3000,00, declared myself broke. Sam Fielder then stood by me like a man, and my father-in-law helped me. I dropped the party at the Lick here and went to card playing and driving horses.

I went to Louisiana and made \$700,00 on my horse, and Allen being in partnership with me, made some \$2,500 00 on cards. The Citizens' Bank, at Natchez was then in operation, and being very much crowded, I was pushed in at the window and drew a ticket, realizing \$125,00, and took a share in the bank. I was successful in every way.

Having sent my clothes home, my friends thought that I was dead, and divided with Allen for his part of the horses and squared up the debts against my

brother and myself at Maysville. Samuel Fielder continued his favors, and I continued driving horses from year to year. I drove horses nineteen years successively, and made fifteen hundred dollars every trip, all honest, clear and clean.

In 1839, I drove nine wagons to Georgia loaded with bacon, and the yellow fever being bad I left there immediately, and returned the next year to collect my money, taking along a drove of horses. (I was taking intermission from counterfeiting.) I rented the stables in Augusta for \$100,00 a year and kept a large boarding house, made money fast in '54, and brought home eleven negroes, a fine carriage and a pair of horses. Henry Clay paid me a visit. Hearing that I was likely to have a suit about bringing negroes here from Georgia, I sent them off and sold them for the money.

David Ballingall and Riddle standing in need of money to buy a load of pork, forged my name to a note; and drew out of Paris bank some money, what amount I do not know, as I never paid it. This was in January, 1848. I now had money enough to do me, and John McCarty wanting some, I went to Cynthiana to get some counterfeit. The week after, Johnson, an itinerant, brought me the money, and it was appropriated to John McCarty's benefit.

I will now give the names of those who were the most prominent men of the party with whom I have been concerned and have a knowledge as such. I could enumerate men of every grade as such; but as

I before stated I dealt in the article as a commodity, buying and selling it. I have sold it to David Bell, who has bought it of me, and when I was taken up for counterfeiting, he told me he bored a hole in the house log, put the money in and drove in a pin on the same.

He and Bill Pain promised that if I should be taken up, they would swear me clear; but they stood by and heard the trial in my case, and rendered no assistance. I appeal to the community for their decision in the justice of the course pursued by me, as we are united under the most solemn vows to defend each other. Young men of the world, keep clear of them, they will not do; for they have deceived me and they will deceive you.

Counterfeiters are confined to no particular State or climate, but extend from Maine to Georgia, of high rank and low rank, but like all other fraternities, it has its big men and its little men. I was a kind of cashier, but they thought I drank too much whisky. Moses Hopkins, of Nicholas, who was cashier of the genuine bank in Carlisle at the same time that he was cashier of our bank, Robert Pain Silas, of Nicholas, John J. Robinson, Grimes, the son of the celebrated Howard, Alfred Bowin, Grotion, Douton, Anson Browning, who passed \$50 North Carolina, and \$5 Kentucky bills on Borry, a perfectly honest man; Wm. Fogison, Calvin Mulican, David Parker, Harry Cracraft. Fontleroy, Ball, Wm. Wiggins, Conway, Collins, James Hubanks, Wm.

Pursell, Dutch Mary, Wm. Mitchell, son of Col. Mitchell, of Virginia, who bought all the property they own with counterfeit money, buying the gold of Cummins Jackson, of Virginia. Shortly afterwards, they having some on hand, and some men coming to the mill to get whisky, Mitchell, suspecting they were coming to arrest him threw the gold in the mill-dam. Wm. Massy and James Meeks are the witnesses. Being very sick, I shall be compelled to close soon, though I recollect many others.

I feel that of all men I am the most miserable, and I do not expect to bear it long. My poor children will no doubt look upon this as the last act of their father's life, and with sorrow and regret shedding the tears of sad recollection over the end of a ruined and degraded father. I hope that never in their lives will my crimes be the means of casting a disrespectful reflection upon them, who are innocent of all such vices. I warn you, my sons, to beware of counterfeiters; they will come upon you as a thief in the night, as they did upon me. Strange it must seem, when I say card playing, drunkenness, and counterfeiting are twin sisters, and go hand in hand; and for drunkenness they have left me to suffer. It is seldom that I have seen a good hand with cards, but he made a pretty good hand at counterfeiting, and I know them wherever I see them.

I cannot continue this work to any great length in my present state of health, and therefore shall refer briefly to the incidents of my life. The next event

worthy of consideration was my trip to Georgia. There was fifty-two hundred dollars coming to me there, and I went to collect it. I arrived in Georgia, and began as usual with my friends drinking and gambling. I was Peter Harrison's security for two hundred and forty dollars, and was taken with a bail writ and put to jail there. I lay there twenty-two months, and during that time, it was reported here, and there both, that I was in jail for passing bad money, which was false. A great many persons came in to see me, and made many propositions in regard to counterfeiting, and proposing that if I would accede to them, that they would burn the bill. I instructed them how to counterfeit a man's note. This I conceive to be one of the most dangerous arts; but one which any man may learn if he is disposed to practice. I understand it perfectly well, and can perform the work of filling up blanks with as much precision as any other man perhaps. This is done by a glass before the evening sun, or any similar light in front of the genuine type, with a gold leaf laying on the glass, and taking the signature of the genuine bill by picking with the point of a small cambric needle. Having done this so as to correspond upon the gold leaf with the letters of the signature of the genuine note, cut out the pick with a knife point, and you then have the type of the signature upon the gold leaf; lay it upon the counterfeit blank, and with a fine brush made of camel's hair or something similar, having ink upon it, you will rub

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the brush on the gold leaf laying on the blank, and you then have the counterfeit. This I have showed to many, but I advise all men not to engage in it.

I went home from Georgia after standing my trial, and being released from the debt, having paid the debt before. I then returned to Georgia on a pleasure trip, thinking that I had so much money that I could never spend it all. I staid in Georgia some two or three months and then engaged in a faro bank. There I made money very fast while I continued, but returned home again. A few days after I got home I swopped horses with Bill Pain. I traded him a fine horse that I brought from Georgia, and gave him five dollars in gold to boot and sold that horse to Bill Nash for five hundred dollars. Wm. Pain and Nash got the money, which was counterfeit, on the Bank of Ohio, and David Bell and Wm. Pain passed the money. I then sold 100 acres of land for four thousand dollars Tennessee money, all counterfeit. Moses Hopkins got that money of me and passed over two thousand dollars of it. I then bought of this same Wm. Nash four hundred dollars, and Moses Hopkins passed that for me and paid me some good money.

Moses Hopkins then employed me and Alison Brown to go to Indiana and buy claims against Jas. Colwell and Wesley Boyd. We had a suit, they succeeded, and then took it to Chancery. Moses Hopkins met me at Hannibal, in St. Louis, and he paid me two fifty dollar bills, and I bought a watch

paid me two counterfeit fifty dollar bills, with which I bought a watch, but being followed by the man who sold it to me, I redeemed it with good money. Moses Hopkins also took it back. We then went to New Orleans, where Moses Hopkins passed \$1,500 counterfeit money. Nothing occurred after that until the circumstances which led to my apprehension and conviction. Moses Hopkins, in the first place (so he told me) directed Dutch Mary to take a box to my house. She did so, and delivered it to my black boy for safe keeping. I was then in Missouri. The boy took it and buried it in the loom house. This press, or a part of it was used all summer at Moses Hopkins' spring house by a man by the name of Sickin, who, I understand, is now at Cincinnati. Dutch Mary brought him and his wife to my house when I was in Missouri, and this gave rise to my recent fate and ruin; and it being found at my home, I was arrested. I shall soon close, and I expect, render an account for all I have herein set forth; and I tell the truth, God being my witness. I never knew anything about that press or box for which I am condemned by twelve men who sat in judgment on my case. I never had any knowledge of its being there until it was found; therefore you have condemned an innocent man in this case, though I am not pleading innocence in all cases. I have no more disclosures to make to my own personal knowledge. I am acquainted with the celebrated Tom Robinson, the King of all counterfeiters, who has many names.

While he stopped at the Blue Licks he called himself Capt. Samuel Allen, of South Carolina. He sent me an invitation to come and see him which I did.

I was introduced to Tom Roberts, in Georgia, by Chain Stroud, being twenty miles this side of Greenville Court House, as a celebrated counterfeiter and engraver. He presented me a plate, and requested me to bring it to Fugatee, the great engraver, who broke the Penitentiary. Before I delivered it to Fugatee, he came to the Springs, or Licks, and when I got there he had taken stage and was gone. I would here state how I became a companion of these men. Charley Summers and John McCarty reported that I had been put in jail for passing counterfeit money, which had a tendency to call in the party, and there it was that they proposed to burn the jail, or unlock the doors, they having keys for that purpose. A few days after I was to meet Tom at the Licks, and a tall fine gentleman came to my house with a letter from him, requesting me to meet him, Captain Allen, at Mark Williams', who was one of the party, and who lived on the Ohio river, in Greenup county, directing me, in the letter, how to find him without making any inquiry; but something occurred, so that I could not meet him there on the day appointed but substituted Joseph Myers, who also failed to meet him. Henry Hubanks then went to Myers', by my orders, and got the plate and brought it to my house. I gave the plate to Wheeler Anderson, who took it to

Cincinnati and had it changed in Georgia to Indiana, and those \$10 Indiana bills were made on that plate. I would here state how Robinson and myself came by this plate. We gave the clerk of the bank six hundred dollars to steal it out of the bank. There was two plates on it, one ten and one twenty. Wheeler and Anderson agreed to give me a thousand of each for the plate, which they paid Moses Hopkins for me, but he died and I lost it all.

I paid Robinson for his part on both plates, being two on one. I then sold one hundred acres of land to a class leader in the Methodist Church by the name of Nash, who lived two years at May's Lick, and some time at Maysville, and was a class leader at both places, and a man of high standing. For the farm he gave me four thousand dollars counterfeit money, both him and me knowing it to be such.

I will now finish the story of my old friend, who has as many names as there are seasons. He is a high toned gentleman, and having been my close friend I regret what I am compelled to say in this work against him; but I must, as I set out to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and I hope he will forgive me, as I am done with such things; I mean Capt. Allen. He returned from Mark Williams' to Carlisle, and instructed Moses Hopkins to tell me not to be uneasy, for he had passed that day, on the Flemingsburg bank, three or four hundred dollar bills. The reason he said this was because he had left with me two thousand dollars to pass, and charged

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