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Of the Skiles, the Underwoods,
the McElroys, etc, written for
the Louisville Times, by J.J.
M'Affee.

From

THE WEEKLY TIMES-GAZETTE
Bowling Green, Kentucky
Wednesday, June 23, 1884.

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Hon. Henry Hamilton Skiles

In the United States it is the breach rather than the observance where property descends from father to the son. In the State of Kentucky this is especially true. The people as a people are warm-hearted, impulsive and generous. They live well and keep "open house" the year around for their friends. They never count the costs. While it lasts all are expected to enjoy it. And, as a consequence, when the demands of the "butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker" are made, estates often swindle to meet the legal requirements in the case. Only now and then do we see a lo management and discretion go hand in hand, and the law of inheritance remains as forcible through generations as that of unavoidable entailment.

A special case in point is "Rich Pond Grove", the homestead of Henry Hamilton Skiles, the place of his birth, and descended to him through his father, William H. Skiles. It is situated in Warren County, Ky., and is as well known to the denizens of Warren as the county seat.

Warren County is a splendid county to live in. The people are intelligent, progressive and aspiring. The lay of the land is undulating, the soil fertile and productive, the water especially fine and health-giving. The exports are prolific and of that character of production for which Kentucky is famous - tobacco, wheat, corn and pork.

The county was named in honor of Gen. Joseph Warren, M.D., a physician of note, a patriot, an orator, a politician and a soldier. The Dunker Hill Monument occupies the site where he fell - the first General on the American side of the struggle to lose his life for liberty. He was one of the grandest officers of the Revolution, second to none but the immortal Washington. And from his grave, as it were, have sprung the immortelles of genius that must forever bloom imperishably in the hearts of the American people, even as the stars glow in the undimmed splendor at the zenith; for such orators as Webster, Everett and the Abbotts have woven their immortelles of memory into fadeless wreaths of eloquence that cannot die while the Republic endures. The pride of name has resolved itself into the hearts of the people of Warren and has aided in making it one of the noblest counties in the State. It has ever been the chosen home of the Underwood, the McElroy and the Skiles families, than which there are none more honorable, gifted and distinguished in America.

William H. Skiles, the father of the subject of this biographical sketch, was born in Goochland County, Va. in 1799. He was the son of William Skiles, a native of Virginia.

The Skiles family originally came from Copenhagen, Denmark. That was some two hundred years ago. They divided into two settlements - one part in Pennsylvania and one in Virginia.

William H. Skiles was brought to Kentucky when quite a child. His education was received in Kentucky and Virginia. He acquired by inheritance, supplemented by personal industry, a fine farm of splendid land in Warren county, on which he lived, and by which he accumulated a large fortune. He

was a man of unflinching industry, of superb mental attainments, of remarkable originality and distinctive character. His acumen, when weighing human nature in the balance, was instantaneous and unerring; his infinite variety of jest and repartee, and his conversational powers, were unsurpassed. It was the attic salt of superior intellectuality which to this day fills the neighborhood in which he lived with observations and witticisms that have outlived their author.

The mother of Henry H. Skiles was Miss Lucy A. Underwood, a daughter of John Underwood, and a sister of Judge Joseph R and Hon. Warren L. Underwood. The lady was as famous for her grace, beauty, and elegance as her brothers were distinguished for their ability and dignity of character.

Judge Joseph R. Underwood represented his county in the Legislature for twelve years. He was Speaker of the House; served eight years in the United States Congress; served six years in the United States Senate, and for seven years he was Judge of the Appellate Court of Kentucky.

Hon. Warren L. Underwood was a member of the United States Congress for four years, and for several other years he was American Consul to Scotland.

John Underwood, the father of Mrs. Skiles, was a native of Goochland county, Va., and for many years he was a member of the Virginia Legislature. To be this nowadays has grown to be an empty honor. But then such public positions were awarded by the sovereign people only as a recognition due to ability and superior merit.

The father of John Underwood, was Thos. A. Underwood, a native of Hanover county, Va. - a man of prominence in the Revolutionary war - a Colonel in Washington's army, and for many years a member of the House of Burgesses. He was the son of William Thomas Underwood, who came to Virginia from Maryland in 1690. He settled near Richmond and amassed quite a fortune. He was ever a man of

prominence in his adopted State.

Henry Hamilton Skiles in a rare degree has inherited those qualities that marked the distinctive individuality of his ancestry on both sides of his house. From his father he inherited sterling manhood, clear perceptive faculties, quick wit, a keen sense of the ridiculous (which makes him one of the most entertaining and companionable of men), and a splendid physique.

From his mother came a high type of intellectuality, a love of the beautiful, the true, the good; a rich vein of poesy, and an easy and graceful fluency of speech.

Mr. Skiles received his early education in the country schools in the neighborhood of his father's residence.

But this procedure of mental attainment did not satisfy his aspiring mind, remarkable even at that early age. The monotony incident to life on a farm palled on his soul, and, finding no marked opposition at home, to his desire to change the course of his destiny, while yet a youth he left his sacred precincts, and going to Bowling Green he obtained a place to write in the County and Circuit Clerks' office. Here he continued his labors for two years. Full of ambition, glowing with the aspiring ardor of youth, he felt that somewhere in the world there was a niche that he was created to fill. Desiring to perfect his education, he left the Clerk's office and was sent to Hopkinsville, Ky., where for several terms he prosecuted his studies with conscientious vigor, acquiring a first class English Education.

In 1855 he matriculated in Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., took the entire law course and graduated with high honor in 1856.

After his return from Harvard he began the practice of his profession in Bowling Green, associated with Capt. W.W. Western, one of the most talented young men in Kentucky.

About that time the Kansas fever of emigration seized on the hearts of the people everywhere, and young Skiles, with a keen foresight that would have done credit to an older and more worldly head, took a trip to Kansas City, in which place he invested a few hundred dollars, which proved a veritable gold find, for that investment now constitutes a good part of his fortune.

After this he was often in the West. He was full of speculative talent which amounted almost to genius with him. He failed in nothing he undertook. He had many thrilling experiences with Indians and border ruffians, and when he returned to his native heather he was none the worse off for his extended knowledge of his fellowmen.

In 1860 he combined with the practice of his profession the occupation of an editor. In that year he purchased the Gazette, and until the destruction of his printing office by fire in 1862, he conducted his literary venture with ability and brilliance. The fire was accidental, having been caused by the Federal soldiers occupying the office as a shelter from the biting cold on the night after the Confederates had evacuated Bowling Green.

During the war, Mr. Skiles was a "Union man," i. e., he was opposed to secession, because in its adoption he could see only woe and disaster for the South and the interests of the entire Union. He opposed, however, every Republican encroachment on constitutional rights with equal fervor. He was, as he is to-day, at all times, a consistent, true, conscientious Democrat - an honor to himself and his party.

In 1863 he was elected County Attorney. He served a term of four years. As a prosecutor he was able, fearless and independent. A rare combination of characteristics in the turbulent condition of affairs incident to civil war.

In 1866 he revived and again edited the Gazette. It was during this time in his career that George D. Prentice became his close friend. It is a subject of pride on the part of Mr. Skiles to recur to this gentle friendship, whose memory survives the opening of a grave. His fidelity to the great man's memory is but one of his many attractive qualities, and his reminiscences, in which Mr. Prentice was associated, are not the least enjoyable to his pleasant conversations.

Mr. Skiles was dilettanteish in light literature. His verses are, many of them, stamped with the unmistakable genius of the true poet. Many gems from the storehouse of his fancy are still to be seen in the exchanges. His prose is at once vigorous and ornate. But through all his literary work runs visibly the fine silver line of poesy. His poems are usually the creations of impulse, as the following attests - it having been inspired by the sight of a pretty girl at vespers. It is called:

THE BEAUTIFUL AT PRAYER

I saw a sinless maid bow down
At God's unsullied shrine,
Her pure, pale cheek, her hair's gold crown,
Her air devout and half divine
Embodied her as Prayer.

She seemed a wandering spirit come
From off her Pleiad flight
And bringing from her heavenly home
The soft, supernal light
Of glory that is there!

What matter could it be to me
That she was clad in Fashion's guise?
And my soul not in reverie
Beheld the angel in her eyes?
The aureola round her brow?

Her parted lips exhaled a sigh
Sweet as the rose's breath
When, thrilling 'neath the sun's glad eye,
She bursts from her green silken sheath
And the flowers before her bow.

She seemed not to have felt the taint
Or touch of earthly care.
But, silent as a sweet-browed saint,
Continued kneeling there,
Absorbed in holy thought.

And yet an arrow had been sent -
A swift unerring dart!
And the cruel barb its power had spent
In piercing her young heart,
And Grief the blood had caught.

This I knew by the mourning garb,
That wrapt her fair nose found,
And crepy veil with jet black barb
To hold its dusk folds down
From her sorrow-shad d face.

Black-robed, I saw her bosom swell
As though with feeling blent,
While from the sacred altar fell
The promise: "If ye but repent
Ye shall receive all grace."

I looked upon the maiden there,
So pure and undenied,
Resigning to her Saviour's care
And guidance like a child
Her whole heart's bitter grief.

And longed to rouse me from the dreams
In which I walked apart,
Aspiring still to nobler themes -
To purer faith - a steadfast heart
And holier belief.

The prayer was hushed. Soft on the air
The mellow music pealed;
The altar lights, and the flowers fair
Now brilliance seemed to yield,
And censor fires burned low.

And yet I lingered with a prayer
Unprayed within my heart,
To that fair maiden kneeling there,
Her fragrant lips apart -
I lingered, loath to go.

Blest being of a purer light,
I longed to breathe to you
A wish - a hope - a soul's respite,
That when God thou didst woo
Thou wouldst remember me.

And if, albeit from a far,
The hour were known to soul of mine,
I'd turn, as pilgrim to his star,
And blend my prayer with thine
In pure felicity.

In August, 1869, Mr. Skiles was elected by a large majority a member of the House of Representatives. In this capacity he served his constituents for two sessions.

Subsequently, until 1879, he was engaged in the management of his rapidly-accumulating business, for which he gradually abandoned the practice of his profession, devoting himself entirely to his Western investment and speculations.

In 1879 he was elected from the Eleventh district to the Senate, in which body politic he served with distinction to himself and satisfaction to his constituents for a term of four years.

A re-election was tendered him, but the press of private affairs forbade his continuance in public life.

As an illustration of his ready wit, quick perception and fertility of resource, the following incident is not inappropriate.

When Robert J. Walker was appointed Governor of Kansas, and was already on his voyage up the Missouri river, he was expected to stop for awhile at Wyandotte, at which point the people proposed to meet him with a welcoming address for Kansas.

Mr. Skiles was at the wharf also for the purpose of meeting him, although he, too, was a stranger to almost every one.

Finally the steamer appeared and was greeted with wild enthusiastic huzzahs. The wharf-boat was crowded with people. But just before the steamboat landed there came a sweeping gust of wind, and the rain fell in torrents. The unexpected "damper" placed by the elements on the welcome made many serious faces in the crowd. When the boat landed it was but a moment until it was off again steaming

along its destined course.

The editor of the Wyandotte paper (who knew Mr. Skiles personally) was expected to deliver the address on the occasion. He had already prepared it; indeed it was "set up" for publication. As the steamboat pushed off he was in despair, for the Governor had not arrived.

Happening to be near Mr. Skiles, he asked him in a subdued voice what he was to do, briefly explaining his dilemma.

Fertile in resources, Mr. Skiles appreciated the situation, and said in an entreneous voice that Walker was a stranger to the crowd, and so he was, and if it would be any favor to the editor that he would personate the Governor - that he was confident in the rain and the confusion it was not known if Walker had or had not arrived, and there was no danger of detection. It was a bold proposition, but it seemed a capital one to the editor. They warmly shook hands. After which cordial procedure the newspaper man delivered his welcoming address in the most approved style to the acting Governor of Kansas. At the proper moment Skiles, with an impromptu eloquence, responded, thanking him for the kindly reception, and promising to do all he could for the advancement and development of the infant State.

The scheme proved a success. The Governor was introduced to a few persons. He soon, however, escaped from the crowd and disappeared on the next boat.

The next day everything was in the paper - speeches and all - and everybody was happy.

To this day Mr. Skiles to many of the older citizens of Wyandotte, is "Governor."

The incident is characteristic of the man. He is full of dash and humor. His life has been an eventful one.

He is still a bachelor.