

TOM BUFORD'S SURRENDER.

BROKEN DOWN IN BODY AND SPIRIT JUDGE
ELLIOTT'S SLAYER RETURNS TO THE
ASYLUM.

From the Louisville Courier-Journal, June 6.

Col. Tom Buford was returned to the Anchorage Asylum yesterday. It has been about 19 months since his escape, when he left a hale and hearty man. He returned broken down in body and mind, his giant frame wasted by disease to a skeleton and his haughty spirit utterly cowed by his misfortunes and sufferings.

Every one knows the history of Judge Elliott's murder. The tragedy occurred four or five years ago, but it is yet fresh in the public mind. He was the first man sitting upon the Bench of the State's most august tribunal, the Court of Appeals, to be shot down while wearing the robes of his high office. Whether he met his death at the hands of a madman or a deliberate murderer, the deed shocked the State and shocked the Nation.

Tom Buford was known all over Kentucky. He belonged to the proudest of the proud aristocracy of the blue-grass region, and he inherited a fortune. The Bufords were a historic family, scarcely less famous than the Breckinridges, the Clays, or the Marshalls. Judge Elliott's slayer was a typical Kentuckian in his powerful physique, his handsome face, his intellect, and the prodigality of his life. Few men were better read than he; his manners were the perfection of grace and courtesy, and he was a brilliant conversationalist. He was an old bachelor, devoted to the ladies and to wine. He played cards and bet on horse-races with the boldness and dash so characteristic of Kentuckians, and whether at poker or on horses he won and lost with a touch-and-go freedom.

Reverses came after a while, and first one and then another of the Buford possessions slipped away from the family. The dashing Colonel lost, too, and then one disappointment after another changed him from a bon vivant to a moody, reckless man. He took to drinking, and brooded till he became a monomaniac. Finally a long lawsuit gave his last farm, nominally owned by his sister Mary, to a man named Guthrie, and Tom Buford was a beggar. One day he took a shot-gun and, throwing it over his shoulder, started out to kill the man who he believed was leagued with his enemies. He met Judge Elliott, and slew him at sight. His arrest and the trial which followed made an epoch in the criminal jurisprudence of Kentucky. The ablest legal talent in the land was engaged for both the defense and the prosecution, and money was spent like water to secure his acquittal. The defense raised the plea of insanity, and the most noted experts obtainable gave their testimony for or against the theory. When the voluminous testimony was closed the counsel exhausted themselves in brilliant arguments, whose eloquence has not been forgotten, nor will it be for years. The first trial resulted in a verdict of guilty, and Tom Buford was condemned to hang. A new trial was procured, and after months had been consumed in going over the case he was acquitted on the ground of insanity, and removed to the Asylum at Anchorage. Both trials occurred at Owenton.

Buford took his acquittal as haughtily as he did his arrest. He had never denied his guilt, and he gloried in the deed which he said had rid the State of a corrupt Judge. He was sent to Anchorage, where Dr. Gale allowed him many privileges, and nearly two years ago he took advantage of this laxity to make his escape. Even this action was characteristic. He came boldly to this city and then proceeded over to Jeffersonville. Once off Kentucky soil he could snap his fingers at the asylum authorities, and they could not cajole him into returning. He took up his quarters at the National Hotel in Jeffersonville, where he has lived ever since. Now and then a wild rumor would spring up that he was again on the war path, and once or twice he visited Kentucky, but he soon went back, and gradually sank into public forgetfulness. Three weeks ago Capt. J. Crit. Ireland, of this city, went over to see his old friend. Arriving at the hotel, he asked an emaciated old man if he could see Col. Buford. The man broke down and cried like a child when he found that one of his best friends had failed to recognize him in the wreck to which suffering and disease had brought him. From being a giant of 225 pounds he had dwindled down to 118, and it seemed as if he was almost ready to sink into the grave. He was without money, hope, or friends, almost without clothes, and utterly broken-hearted. Capt. Ireland was greatly affected, and induced the old man to come over and visit him one night shortly afterward. He went back to see him, and at last succeeded in persuading him to return to Anchorage, where he took him yesterday morning. He carried with him his fishing tackle, and when they neared the asylum he could not restrain his delight. The place which was once his prison he gladly welcomed, and he was most kindly received. Capt. Ireland has always been a devoted friend to Col. Buford, and no other man could have induced him to take this step. His career has been a remarkable one, but the asylum will doubtless witness its close, as he does not appear to be able to live much longer.

The New York Times

Published: June 9, 1884

Copyright © The New York Times