ONE early December day in the year 1884 John Martin rode off in his jolt wagon from his home on Christy Creek in Rowan County, Kentucky, bound for the county seat, the village of Morehead. Beside him, on the backless board wagon seat, was Lucy, his wife. Lucy Trumbo she was before her marriage to John. On her arm she carried a hickory basket well filled with the eggs and butter she meant to trade for calico and thread, coffee and spices, while John mingled with friends around the courthouse or swapped nags. Two of the younger Martin children, Ben, and Lin, the baby, sat behind them in the wagon bed, for their father had made it comfortable with hay.

When they reached the county seat, John's wife, taking the two little boys, went to do her trading at a near-by store. She stood a moment in the muddy road while her husband tied the team to a hitching post near the courthouse. Having made fast the reins he pushed back his wide-brimmed felt and wiped his brow revealing a newly made scar that shone livid in the sunlight. "John," said the wife anxiously, fixing her eyes upon the scar, "pay no mind to their talk. Shun any of them," she pleaded fearfully, "shun any that come packin' tales. Let bygones be bygones."

John Martin well knew the cause of his wife's anxiety. Only a few months before he had gone to the county seat on election day to cast his vote, like many others in Rowan. Then, while he was standing on the courthouse steps with a group of friends, an argument arose over the election. Biows were struck. One fell upon the head of Martin. Blood trickled down his face and stained his shirt. With many fists flying in the air, no one, not even
Martin himself, had known exactly who had struck him. Some said it was Floyd Tolliver. Floyd’s forbears had come from Virginia. The name was really Talliaferro.

“Don’t trouble about it, Lucy,” he replied with gentle reassurance, “I’ve plum forgot that little row long ago. Nohow, the election’s all over. Let them that got office have it. I’m not carin’ anything about it.”

As they stood talking, Floyd Tolliver rode by. The men exchanged swift, suspicious glances.

‘John,” again Lucy turned to her mate, “don’t pay no mind to the tale bearin’. There are some that’s got Floyd’s mind pizened agin’ you, I reckon.” Her eyes followed Tolliver riding down the road.

“Go along and do your tradin’,” John made light of Lucy’s apprehension, “and soon as you’re ready, we’ll be headed for home. I was only wantin’ to see Uncle Sol about that heifer he’s aimin’ to swap, though I might strike up a trade on old Beck,” he patted the flank of the nigh horse, “if he offers enough to boot. But nohow, you go along and come back here to the wagon when you’re through and I’m satisfied I’ll be through ahead of you and waitin’ for you.” John Martin picked up his baby, kissed him and pressed a copper cent in the small hand saying, “there, now buy you some store candy.” He patted Ben on the head and gave the lad a dime, “for them new red galluses I promised you for helpin’ me plow.” And so the little family parted.

A short time later John’s wife and the children, returning to the wagon, looked on in terror while a shouting, cursing mob dragged him across the road to the jail. Floyd Tolliver lay in a pool of blood in Carey’s saloon—shot to death. A smoking pistol was snatched from John Martin’s hand.

In 1887, over two years later, a joint committee from the Senate and House of the Kentucky Legislature was appointed to investigate the “trouble” in Rowan County. The joint committee made its report through
the Honorable John K. Hendricks, chairman, on March, 1888. It declared, in part: "Your committee finds from the evidence that the feud and lawlessness in Rowan County commenced in August, 1884, and grew out of the election of W. Cook Humphrey as sheriff of the county. On the day of the August election, one Solomon Bradley was killed in a street fight. A dispute arose as to whether Floyd Tolliver or John Martin did the killing. Bradley was a Republican and a friend and partisan of said Humphrey, and from the date of that killing and for some months afterward the feuds partook of a political nature. Cook Humphrey and his followers representing a Republican faction and Craig Tolliver and his followers a Democratic faction."

The "street fight" mentioned in the report grew out of an argument between William Trumbo and a man named Price. In the ensuing fist fight John Martin was struck in the face. Pistols were drawn. A bullet struck and killed Solomon Bradley. Ad Sizemore was wounded, but not fatally. It never was decided who did the shooting but from this tragedy the Tolliver-Martin feud had its beginning. It continued until many innocent persons had been killed, houses burned, and John Martin assassinated. Finally Boone Logan, a law abiding citizen, whose two younger brothers had been ruthlessly slain by the Tollivers, called together a group of armed men and put an end to the Tollivers in an open battle on Railroad street in Morehead.

Much of the story I had from Mrs. Lucy Martin herself, long years after the "troubles" when I lived in Rowan County. This widow of John Martin was a quiet spoken mountain woman with sad eyes that turned now and again toward the buryin' ground where her husband lay beneath a weather beaten tombstone. When some of the opposing faction came to her after her husband's slaying she said "You have done me all the harm you can—" and her sad eyes turned to the grave of her mate
off yonder on the hillside. John Martin's son, Ben, I knew quite well and went often to his home. He distinguished himself in the World War. Later when Broadcasting Companies sought him out to dramatize his story for the air, he said to me, when I read him their telegrams, "Woman, I'd be proud to go along with you anywhere on earth. I'd be proud to speak on the radio and tell our side of this unfortunate trouble. But you see my fix." He had been stricken helpless with paralysis and died a few weeks after the honor had been offered him in May, 1938.

Many ballads have been written about the Tolliver-Martin feud. But the best known, of which I possess the original hand-written manuscript, is that composed by James William Day who was present in the courthouse yard the day of the first quarrel when John Martin was struck on the forehead with a pistol butt. Day was present in the county seat at the time Tolliver was killed. And he himself sang his ballad for me in that same courthouse yard in Morehead, in the fall of 1936, on court day, standing in the selfsame spot where he had stood as a young man the day the "troubles" started. To be sure a crowd gathered about us, but a friendly crowd it was indeed. The singer had "ever kept friends" with Martins and Tollivers; he took no sides. So this day, as he sang his ballad of the Rowan County Troubles, he was greeted with cheers and warm hand clasps of Martins and Tollivers alike, the "troubles" long since forgotten except in memory and song. In a firm, unafraid voice the mountain minstrel sang:
Come on young men and ladies,

Mothers and fathers too. I'll re-

late to you the history of the Rowan County
crew Concerning bloody Rowan and her

man-y hein-ous deeds Now friends please give at-

ten- tion, Re-member how it reads
2. It was in the month of August upon election day, 
   John Martin he was wounded, they say by Johnny Day, 
   Martin could not believe it, he could not think it so; 
   He thought it was Floyd Tolliver that struck the fatal blow.

3. They shot and killed Sol Bradley, a sober innocent man, 
   He left his wife and loving children to do the best they can, 
   They wounded young Ad Sizemore; although his life was saved 
   He seemed to shun the grog shops since he stood so near the grave.

4. Martin did recover, some months had come and past, 
   In the town of Morehead those men both met at last; 
   Tolliver and a friend or two about the streets did walk, 
   He seemed to be uneasy and with no one wished to talk.

5. He walked in Judge Carey's grocery and stepped up to the bar, 
   But little did he think, dear friends, that he met the fatal hour; 
   The sting of death was near him, Martin rushed in at the door, 
   A few words passed between them concerning a row before.

6. The people soon were frightened began to rush out of the room, 
   A ball from Martin's pistol laid Tolliver in the tomb. 
   His friends soon gathered round him, his wife to weep and wail; 
   Martin was arrested and soon confined in jail.

7. He was put in the jail of Rowan there to remain a while, 
   In the hands of law and justice to bravely stand his trial. 
   The people all talked of lynching him, at present though they failed, 
   The prisoner's friends soon moved him into the Winchester jail.
8. Some persons forged an order, their names I do not know, The plan was soon agreed upon, for Martin they did go; Martin seemed discouraged, he seemed to be in dread, “They have sought a plan to kill me,” to the jailer Martin said.

9. They put the handcuffs on him, his heart was in distress, They hurried to the station, stepped on the night express. Along the line she lumbered at her usual speed; They were only two in numbers to commit the dreadful deed.

10. Martin was in the smoking car accompanied by his wife, They did not want her present when they took her husband’s life; When they arrived at Farmers they had no time to lose, A band approached the engineer and bid him not to move.

11. They stepped up to the prisoner with pistols in their hands, In death he soon was sinking, he died in iron bands. His wife soon heard the horrid sound; she was in another car, She cried, “Oh Lord! they’ve killed him!” when she heard the pistol fire.

12. The death of these two men has caused great trouble in our land, Caused men to leave their families and take the parting hand. Retaliating, still at war they may never, never cease, I would that I could only see my land once more in peace.

13. They killed the deputy sheriff, Baumgartner was his name, They shot him from the bushes after taking deliberate aim; The death of him was dreadful, it may never be forgot, His body pierced and torn with thirty-three buckshot.

14. I compose this as a warning. Oh! beware, young men! Your pistols may cause trouble, on this you may depend; In the bottom of a whisky glass the lurking devils dwell, It burns the breast of those who drink, it sends their souls to hell.
“You’re right!” called out a young fellow who made his way through the crowd to take the hand of the aged singer. “Whisky’s caused no end of trouble.” Then the singer spoke, “I’m proud such a day as this has come when a body can stand here in the courthouse yard amongst you all, some from one side, some from t’other, and sing this ballad of the Troubles without so much as a dark look from one to t’other. I’m proud to see you all at peace,” he said reverently, and slowly went his way.

Up on Tug River, where I lived for a time, another “war” or “trouble” had its beginning long, long ago in a quarrel between neighbors over the killing of a hog or, according to a second version, of a sheep by a dog. From so small a beginning ensued a strife that cost many lives and endures today in the memory of many as the Hatfield-McCoy feud. Gruesome stories of blood revenge have been attributed to both sides. Yet in all the time I lived among these families no word of bitterness, much less threats of revenge, ever passed their lips within my hearing.

I remember well one summer day when I wandered into Friendship Hollow to visit with Rhodie, who had been a McCoy, and Lark, her man. He was busily engaged in whittling on the neck of his homemade banjo, while she pieced painstakingly away on “The Double Wedding Ring” quilt.

“A banjer ain’t as lasty as a fiddle,” observed Lark as he whittled and scraped, “but it’s a heap of satisfaction whilst it does hold out. Now this is the second neck I’ve put on this one.” He paused in his work to gaze across the muddy waters of Tug Fork. “I’ve done a heap o’ loggin’ on Tug,” he drawled. With that he was off on many a lengthy tale of his adventures “in the timber” and “loggin’.” Finally he got back to the starting point. “A banjer is a heap o’ company when a man’s single,” Lark cast a sly look in Rhodie’s direction, “I’ve made