THE BALD KNOBBERS.

A Mountain Society Organized to Kill.

MURDER TO CORRECT LAWLESSNESS.

The Scheme of a Giant to Make his Neighbors Holy.

AN AMERICAN PICTURE OF TO-DAY.

Loose Morals in Southern Missouri—Unpunished Outrages—Capt. Kinney's Regulators—A Pair of Daredevils; Why and How they were Strangled—Religion with Gunpowder—Accompaniments—Sunday School between Bullets—One Through the Heart from the Knobber Chief.

INTRODUCTION.

OZARK, Christian County, Mo., Dec. 10.—For the first time since the organization of this county there is a probability of a legal hanging within its limits. Four men are now in the county jail who have, after a long trial, been found guilty of murder in the first degree. Their cases were taken to the Supreme Court for final adjudication and the sentences of two of them have been affirmed. The other two sentences will be affirmed, for the cases are precisely alike. Then, unless the Governor interferes, the men will be hanged. The date set for the first execution is December 28.

OZARK JAIL.

These four men who are now staring death in the face were the leaders of the Christian county branch of the widely known Bald Knobbers of the Ozark Mountains. Their names are David Walker, William Walker (father and son), John Mathews, and Wiley Mathews (uncle and nephew). The crime for which they were convicted was the murder of Charles Green and William Edens. This act was so atrocious that a long-suffering community arose and invoked the aid of the civil law, and the Bald Knobber organization disappeared. Whether it was destroyed remains to be seen.

But before this was done thirteen other men had lost their lives through trouble growing out of this organization, three men and three women had been wounded with bullets, and two women and an unknown number of men had been unmercifully whipped. From brooding over the trouble in which her husband had been involved, one wife of a Bald Knobber went crazy, and after fatally crushing the skulls of two of her children with a hammer, she cut her own throat with her husband's razor, and died within two minutes.

Nor is this history one of bloodshed only, for the Knobber chief lost his life through his connection with a mountain romance, in which his chief lieutenant was the hero, while the lieutenant of the Christian county branch was lured into the road that leads to death on the gallows by his sweetheart.

Of the homes that have been destroyed, and of the wives and children that have been reduced to pitiful want and misery, no account can be written. Their number is legion, their condition beyond description.

In the presence of this story the tales of the deeds of the White Caps in Indiana, and of the Hatfield-McCoy feud in the wilds of the Big Sandy, as already faithfully told in THE SUN, dwindle into insignificance.

PART I.—TANEY COUNTY.

CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BALD KNOBBER IDEA.

The Bald Knob Society originated in Taney (pronounced Tawney) county. In the language of Parson Dennison, an opponent, it was "a beam-eyed society for the eradication of motes." The man who conceived the idea and became the Grand Chief of the order was Capt. N. N. Kinney. He lived on a ranch near Forsyth, the county seat. Kinney was a remarkable man in several respects. He was 6 feet 6 inches tall, but was so well proportioned that no one would have thought him so tall unless he were standing by an ordinary six-footer.

CAPT. KINNEY.

He weighed 290 pounds ordinarily. He had a big head with plenty of active brains. He was black haired and black eyed, and as handsome as he was big. He had been a Captain in the Union army and a special frontier agent of the Post Office Department, where he is said to have killed several men who at one time and another resisted arrest for holding up stages. Finally he came to Springfield, where he opened a saloon. It is said to have been a very popular saloon. With the money he made in selling liquor he bought a square mile of land down in Taney county and stocked it with cattle, sheep, and hogs, and there lived the life of a ranchman. He was about 45 years old when he went to Taney county. He had two children, a boy and a girl, both young, and a stepson, J. A. De Long, who is now editor of the *Taney County News* and Prosecuting Attorney of the county.

Capt. Kinney did not find society in Taney county exactly to his liking. In a formal statement concerning the origin of the Bald Knobers, made a short time before he was shot to death, he said:

"So far as I could learn, the history of Taney county had been a record of lawlessness and disregard of social proprieties. When I came here some four years ago (1883) it was common for men to live with women to whom they had never been married. Why, one old Mormon-like neighbor kept six women. Then the county was $12,000 in debt, and had not even a plank to show for it. The money had simply been stolen. That wasn't all. Over thirty men had been shot to death in the county since the war, and not one of the murderers had been punished by the civil authorities.

"Well, I had come here to lead a retired and quiet life, but I could not refrain from expressing my opinions of such things, and I cannot refrain now. The consequence was that men came to me, and said:

"'Kinney, you had better look out. These people don't like your talk, and you had better go low or you will get it in the neck.'

"'Well,' I said, 'I have had some experience in that line myself, and I say these things should be condemned, and I propose to condemn them.'

"The best men in the county gradually drifted to my side, and it became a war between civilization and barbarism."

That people were grossly immoral, that the county had been robbed, and that many deliberate murders—the number is estimated all the way from thirty-two to forty-two—had been committed and no one punished for them even by imprisonment, are undisputed facts. It is a matter of record that when in 1883 two professional burglars from St. Louis drifted down through Taney county and robbed the county treasury at Forsyth of $3,000, and were afterward convicted and sentenced to the penitentiary for two years each. No man had been sentenced to the penitentiary from Taney county in twenty years before on any account. When Capt. Kinney talked in public about these things the county officials retorted that he was not as an ex-saloon keeper from the slums of Springfield, a proper censor of Taney county morals. People gradually took sides with either Kinney or the officials. Among these officials were Thomas A. Layton, County Clerk; Sampson Barker, Deputy Clerk; John Mosley, Sheriff, and T. C. Spelling, Prosecuting Attorney. The Bald Knobbers of Taney county say that Spelling was simply weak, and permitted criminals to go unpunished because the gang that elected him and held the other offices made him do it.

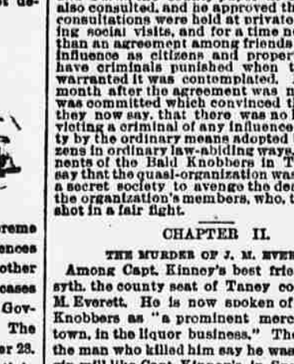
As the breach widened, Capt. Kinney, from his experience on the frontier, saw the necessity of organization if he was to live in the county in security. His friends say that he wanted an organization to preserve order and enforce the civil law. His enemies say that he was the ringleader in a conspiracy of his own to depose, dismember, and incidentally for his own safety. Every man owned arms of some sort, and carried them always in those days—and every one does now for that matter, while the arms of today are much better than any carried then.

Having concluded that an organization was necessary, Capt. Kinney talked the matter over with several of his friends. Among them were Ben Price, Lawyer J. J. Brown (now of Ozark), J. M. Everett, and Yell Everett. "Yell" is only a nickname, his initials being B. Y., but he is known to everybody in Taney only as Yell. His name is significant of one of his most prominent habits. Editor Patterson of the *Home and Farm*, the county paper at Forsyth, was also consulted, and he approved the idea. The consultations were held at private houses during social visits, and for a time nothing more than an agreement among friends to use their influence in their neighborhoods and for property owners to have criminals punished when the evidence warranted it was contemplated. But within a month after the agreement was made a crime was committed which convinced these men, so they now say, that there was no hope of convicting a criminal of any influence in the county by the ordinary means adopted by good citizens in ordinary law-abiding ways. The opponents of the Bald Knobbers in Taney county say that the quasi-organization was turned into a secret society to avenge the death of one of the organization's members, who, they say, was shot in a fair fight.

CHAPTER II.

THE MURDER OF J. M. EVERETT.

Among Capt. Kinney's best friends in Forsyth, the county seat of Taney county, was J. M. Everett. He is now spoken of among the Knobbers as "a prominent merchant of the town, in the liquor business." The friends of the man who killed him say he was running "a gin mill like Capt. Kinney's in Springfield had been, and that the two men were toughs together." Everett's saloon was on the east side of the public square in Forsyth. It was a



EVERETT'S SALOON.

deep one-story building that had been built for a country store. There were two rooms fronting the street, the side room under the low shed roof being occupied by a billiard table. The bar was in the main part of the building.

On Sept. 22, 1883, Al Layton and Sam Hull were playing billiards in Everett's place for the drinks. At the end of each game they took whiskey straight. It is asserted that the whiskey was home made and duty free. The Bald Knobbers deny this. No one denies that the quality of the whiskey was of the sort called forty-rod.

After three or four games, Hull "got it on to Layton in a way that he despised," as his friends say, and Layton started in to teach him that no cheating would be tolerated among gentlemen. Both men were good fighters, but Hull began to take the part of the instructor, rather than that of the pupil. Then Layton "drew his gun," which here means that he drew his revolver.

Then Saloon Keeper Everett jumped on him and threw him down. In fighting the men had come from the billiard room, through the barroom, and out on the veranda. It was here that Layton was downed.

"I don't 'low to hurt ye," said Everett, as he pinioned Layton down on the floor of the porch. "I aim to keep ye out o' trouble. I hain't got any weepon about me, Al, and ye know I wouldn't use it if I had."

There was a gang of interested spectators looking on at the time. Three or four advised Layton to give up his revolver, as he lay on the floor, and promised that he should not be molested further if he did so, but this he steadily refused to do. Finally one of the spectators said to Everett:

"Let him up, Jim."

Everett made the mistake of doing this at once and without taking any precautions for his own safety. Layton got up, knocked the dust partly off of his clothes, and then, with a wild smile on his pale face, raised his pistol and shot Everett through the heart. Everett fell over against the double doors of the billiard room so violently that they were broken in. As the doors gave way, Layton fired a second shot into Everett, and then, whirling partly around, shot Yell Everett through the right shoulder, making him yell louder than he had ever done before, the witnesses say, and that was pretty loud.

Shoving his revolver into a holster, Layton leaped from the veranda into the saddle on a horse that was standing before it, and, clapping spurs to the horse, galloped out of town.

"He didn't have no call to shoot, as I knows on," said a spectator, "but," he added with unconcealed admiration, "it was done damned slick."

At the next session of the Grand Jury, Layton was indicted in due form. Capt. Kinney was one of the Grand Jury. Layton came in and surrendered, and was admitted to bail, as is usual in this part of Missouri in such cases. At the October term of the Circuit Court he was tried.

He pleaded that he was "one in peril;" that he believed the Everetts and Hull were trying to kill him. It is charged that County Clerk Thomas Layton, who was the murderer's cousin, and Sheriff John Mosley, who was a close friend, bribed the Prosecuting Attorney to be easy with the murderer, and that they then plied the jurors with an unusually good quality of whiskey and made them drunk, and that while in this condition they brought in a verdict of not guilty on Oct. 18, 1884. There is no proof of bribery, and Spelling was probably not bribed. It is admitted that the jury got drunk.

The Bald Knobbers say the acquittal of Al Layton made a tremendous sensation throughout the county. The rest say the sensation was confined to the friends of the dead saloon keeper, and that Everett's whiskey caused the whole trouble anyhow. The sensation, however big or small, was the inciting cause of the organization of the Bald Knobbers as a secret society.

CHAPTER III.

ORGANIZED AS A SECRET SOCIETY.

It is commonly believed throughout this country that the first meeting of the Bald Knobbers as a secret organization was held on the big bald peak that eventually gave its name to the society. The fact is that thirteen men met in Forsyth first at the saloon formerly owned by J. M. Everett, but which was then run by his brother Yell. Those who are superstitious will see in the number who were present a portent of what was to come. Among the charter members were Capt. N. N. Kinney, Col. A. S. Prather, Yell Everett, J. B. Rice, T. W. Phillips, Capt. J. K. Van Zandt, Capt. P. F. Fickle, Lawyer J. J. Brown, G. E. Branson, J. K. McHaffie, and J. A. DeLong. Editor Patterson says he was notified to attend, but having been told that it was to be made an oath-bound secret society, he declined to do so. This meeting was held in January, 1885. It was there formally voted, Capt. Kinney being in the chair, to make the order secret. Lawyer J. J. Brown was appointed a committee to draw up the form of an oath for members, and Capt. Kinney to prepare the constitution and by-laws.

J. A. De Long, who was Captain of a company of forty-four Bald Knobers afterward, says the next meeting was held on the great bald peak, the bald knob of the county, which is situated about eight miles west of Forsyth. It was held in April, but he declined to give the day, which was April 5. Capt. Kinney went there alone very early in the morning.

This peak was chosen because it commanded a view of the country for miles around, and no one could get within half a mile of the summit from any direction without being seen by any one there. The members were thus enabled to say that they met openly where any one could see them, but the fact is that no one who had not been invited was allowed to approach, and three farmers who came uninvited were told that if they wanted to come in they must wait until the next meeting. In Mr. DeLong's paper of Sept. 27, 1888, is an article describing this first meeting. He says, as a charter member, that is accurate.

With fear and trembling a few of the most venturesome approached the spot in terror lest they should be led into a trap. As they cautiously ascended at the east of the opening they found a man who was typical of the cause in which they were expected to enlist. This was Capt. N. N. Kinney, a man who was as fearless as he was active, a giant in stature and as straight as an arrow. He had been a pioneer all his life, and was the owner of a large cattle ranch, and had been a sufferer from the depredations of the lawless and Indian infested the section until forbearance ceased to be virtue. With only a half dozen of the best citizens of the country around him he then and there planned the seed which grew into what is to-day known as the organization of Bald Knobbers.

The reference to half a dozen men going there in fear and trembling makes the opponents of the Bald Knobbers snort with disgust. They say that the men rode up to the peak on horseback, and that each one was greeted by Capt. Kinney in person half way down the peak. When all who had been invited were present, the throng numbered nearly a hundred. Capt. Kinney made them a speech to brace them up. This speech, as near as those who heard it can recollect, was a blood-stirring oration over the bloody shirt of J. M. Everett, and the crimes and immorality that had been allowed to go unpunished. It ended thus:

What will become of our sons and daughters? Our lives, our property, and our liberty are at stake. I appeal to you, as citizens of Taney county, to say what we shall do. Shall we organize ourselves into a vigilant committee and see that when crimes are committed the laws are enforced, or shall we sit down and fold our arms and quietly submit?

There was a motion in due form that a "vigilant committee" be organized.

"Are you ready for the question?" said Chairman Kinney.

"Boys, she pops," said a facetious member of the crowd. The saying is common enough among the mountaineers, but it struck the fancy of the crowd at this time, and "Boys, she pops," was thereafter adopted as the "Aye" of the members. This was the second time they had agreed to organize.

Lawyer Brown then brought out the oath he had prepared and read it over aloud. It was approved by all. Then the men joined hands in groups of thirteen each and repeated it as follows:

Do you, in the presence of God and these witnesses, solemnly swear that you will never reveal any of the secrets of this order, nor communicate any part of it to any person or persons in the known world, unless you are satisfied by a strict test, or in some legal way, that they are lawfully entitled to receive them; that you will conform and abide by the rules and regulations of this order, and obey all orders of your superior officers or any brother officer under whose jurisdiction you may be at the time attached; nor will you propose for membership or sanction the admission of any one whom you have reason to believe is not worthy of being a member, nor will you oppose the admission of any one solely on a personal matter. You shall report all evil that is made known to you, and not leave any unreported on account of his being a blood relation of yours; nor will you wilfully report any one through personal enemity. You shall recognize and answer all signs made by lawful brothers, and render them such assistance as they may be in need of, so far as you are able or the interest of your family will permit; nor will you wilfully wrong or defraud a brother, or permit it if you have power to prevent it. Should you wilfully and knowingly violate this oath in any way, you subject yourself to the jurisdiction of twelve members of this order, whose duty it shall be to see that your decision should be to hang you by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead. So help me God.

Although these charter members took the oath while clasping hands, those subsequently initiated had a different sort of ceremony. Charles Graves, a member of the Christian county branch of the Bald Knobbers, testified under oath that when he was initiated he was told, before taking the oath, that once in the order there were but two ways to get out of it.

"One way was at the muzzle of a gun and the other at the end of a rope. There was a belt put around my neck representing a rope, and a pistol put to my breast, and I was told to hold my right hand up and put my left hand on my heart, and then the pledge was administered."

The oath alone was the product of Lawyer Brown. The claptrap ceremony was devised by Capt. Kinney, who very well knew what would make the deepest impression on the minds of the mountaineers. Having taken the oath, the assembly then considered what name they should adopt. It is said that Mr. J. R. Van Zandt, who had been a member of the State Legislature, proposed the name of Bald Knobbers, taking the idea from the bald peak where they were standing. His suggestion was adopted by acclamation.

Of course there must needs be grips, passwords, &c. The work of getting into a meeting when held by day was nothing, for the members were all personally acquainted with each other. At night the Captain of the band had the place of meeting first. Then as each member approached he was required to whistle as long as possible without varying the note. This done the Captain said:

"Who goes there?"

"Bell," answered the member.

"Whose bell?" asked the Captain.

"My bell," the Bald Knobber told THE SUN reporter that the last answer was properly, "Your bell." That was the original answer, but "My bell" was subsequently used altogether.

The first rule for the governing of the order proposed by Capt. Kinney was that nothing should be written in the order, nor any written sign was ever made after the oath had been committed to memory and the written document destroyed. The next rule was that when anything was to be done by the original organization or any of its branches the matter had first to be referred to the chief of the county organization, who was to lay it before a council of five, and thus the course to be pursued was adopted. This rule very quickly fell into disuse, however, and a majority vote of those present decided what should be done.

When work had to be done masks were necessary for women and children of all the members of the organization. Squads of men were sent by every possible route to head off the criminals, who were supposed to be on their way to Arkansas. Other squads scoured the ravines. It was beautiful spring weather, but the trees were in full leaf, and the task of ferreting out three men in a country that is nothing but mountain and ravine, and is covered with dense brush at that, is not an easy one.

However, the work was done thoroughly under Capt. Kinney's directions, and at the end of six days, or on April 14, the trail had got so hot that the two Taylor boys gave up all hopes of escaping. Sublett was not found for several weeks, and was then sent to Springfield. Meantime, however, the Taylor boys had been told that the Dickinsons were not even dangerously wounded. They therefore concluded to surrender to the Sheriff rather than risk meeting a squad of Bald Knobbers. The word was sent to the State prison for Tom Taylor, and Deputies T. H. Toney and Linsh Yeasy went out and brought them in. They were lodged in one of the two cells of the county jail.

This jail is a hewed log hut 15 feet square. Within and without the logs are covered with two-inch oak plank. There are two doors to each cell, an inner and an outer door. Both are of oak plank. The inner door is covered with boiler iron. Both doors are secured with padlocks, the staples being made of half-inch wrought-iron rods.

At exactly 10 o'clock on the night of April 15, the Bald Knobbers, seventy-five strong, galloped down the river and into the public square. Every man was armed and masked. Except when Capt. Kinney gave an order, not a word was spoken. The orders were given in an ordinary tone of voice.

The Knobbers formed a hollow square about the jail at first, and then the chief detailed a number of men to station sentries about the village, the sentries being sent away in pairs. One man was sent to the blacksmith shop. He returned with two sledge hammers.

Everything had been done so quietly that the prisoners, although awakened by the arrival of the troop, did not comprehend what was happening. When the big hammers arrived they learned right away. A member of the troop began to batter the padlock and staple on the outer door. That first blow took all the bravado out of the prisoners, if it did not damage the lock much. The Bald Knobbers were terribly in earnest this time, however. After a half-dozen blows by the Knobbers who held the sledge hammers had failed to make any valuable impression on the lock, the stalwart chief grabbed a sledge himself. Kinney was a giant in strength as well as stature. At the first blow the lock split, at the second the staple cracked half off, and at the third the lock flew ten feet away, where it was found next morning. The twisted and broken pieces of the staple and a deep dent in the door are still pointed out to the wayfarer as the work of the Knobber chief.

With each blow of the sledge hammer the prisoners within screamed for help. Their cries were heard all over the village, but no one not a member of the Knobbers dared leave his home. When the outer lock was knocked away, the inner door was opened by prying out the staple. The prisoners, now weeping and screaming hysterically, crawled under their rough plank bunk and shrank back against the wall, as if that would save them. They were hauled out by the feet, kicking and clutching at the boards of their bunk, and the side rail of the bunk was torn away by the despairing grip of Frank Taylor before he was dragged out of the cell.

Once in the open air, they found two horses waiting for them. The Knobbers picked their prisoners as bags of corn are handled, and placed them in the saddles. Their feet were tied by ropes to the cinch straps, but not so tightly, the Knobbers say, as to make the journey painful. Then the Knobbers formed in line, with their victims in the middle, and started up the road that leads to Springfield. The voices of the prisoners begging for mercy were heard by the Forsyth people growing fainter as the procession rode away, and finally the sounds died out entirely. A few had peered out of their windows and seen the prisoners struggling about on the horses in torment, but no one in the village ever saw either prisoner again alive.

It is a lonely road. It winds along between the monotonous scrub oak trees, with houses at such rare intervals as to make the stranger wonder whether there is much need of a road there at all. So much timber that the Bald Knobbers had to ride nearly two miles before they could find a tree with limbs large enough to sustain the weight of two men. On the top of a ridge, however, stood a tree familiar to all of them on account of its size. A long limb projected over the roadway about fifteen feet above the ground. Beneath that tree the procession halted. The prisoners were asked if they had anything to say, and if they wanted to pray to God for forgiveness for their sins. Their only answer was a continuation of their pitiful appeals to the merciless Knobbers. The rope was brought to the front by one of the Knobbers. A noose was tied in each end and then the slight of the rope was tied to the long oak limb above the road. Then, while the prisoners fought desperately to prevent it, a noose was placed around the neck of each, though it took three men to hold each prisoner. Then the rope was adjusted. While the Knobbers still held their victims the ropes that bound their legs to the cinch straps were cast off and used to secure the arms of the prisoners. Then the Knobbers gave a yell, and the horses on which the prisoners had been seated trotted away, leaving them swinging to and fro and striking against each other, and interwinding their legs as they struggled in the throes of death.

It was fifteen minutes, the Knobbers say, before all signs of life disappeared. To a few of the Knobbers it seemed an awful period of almost endless duration; to the majority it was a spectacle that afforded a grim satisfaction. But not a word was spoken until the boys were dead. Then a placard was placed on the breast of one of the corpses, and the Knobbers were formed in line and ordered to break ranks.

The next morning the villagers were astir at daylight, but no earlier. They gathered in knots about the square, stared at the broken lock and staple on the jail doors, and talked vaguely and with a painful anxiety not to offend anyone. Of 100 men who gathered there two only were found brave enough to follow the trail of the horsemen. They were T. H. Tony and J. L. Parrish. On the top of the hill they found the two victims, with faces distorted and limbs hanging straight down. On the breast of Tubal Taylor was the cover of a big pasteboard shoe box, on which had been written in rude Roman characters:

BEWARE!
These are the first Victims to the Wrath of
Outraged Citizens. More will follow.
THE BALD KNOBBERS.

When these two men returned and reported the facts, Justice of the Peace W. H. Jones and a Coroner's jury led the way thither, and the bodies were cut down and brought to the Court House and laid out on a table. The jury considered the case, learned what a great many witnesses didn't know about the case, and then brought in as a verdict that, "We, the jury, find that Frank and Tubal Taylor came to their death by hanging, at the hands of about 100 men, to this jury unknown."

The Taylor family was then notified to come and take their dead, but this they refused to do, and the bodies were buried at the county's expense in a neglected plot called Eglinton Cemetery out on Nubbin Ridge.

Except for Capt. Kinney, who was recognized by his form, no one not, with him then could say who did the deed. The lynching had been done so secretly, and withal so unexpectedly, that a tremendous sensation was created. The name of Bald Knobber became a terror to the country side for miles around, and from that time to this, except among the families of Bald Knobbers, the name is used by foolish mothers to frighten obstreperous children into obedience.

No one will say openly, even now, who took part in the lynching, but every one of the members of the order mentioned so far was there. It is rumored that the Hon. A. S. Prather, member elect to the Legislature, examined the rope, and that Mr. Kissee, whose cattle had been mutilated by Tubal Taylor, adjusted the nooses about the necks of the victims.

The lynching roused the fears of the friends of what the Knobbers call the old county ring. There was so much feeling on the subject, however, that men on both sides sent out for weapons of modern make, and no man ventured away from home unarmed. There was little or no neutrality allowed in the county. Every citizen had to take sides in some way, and, having inspired the country side with fear by his secret society, Kinney became at once the chief of the larger faction. People flocked to the Knobber standard to escape persecution. It is interesting to note that among those who were enrolled among the Knobbers at the time of the lynching and afterward were three Methodist, two Disciple, and two Baptist preachers, as follows: The Rev. Messrs. Van Zandt, Power, Spears, Owen, Johnson, Winkle, and Dimmick.

Still, as the victims of the Knobbers were acknowledged bad citizens, the matter of the lynching would have soon passed out of mind had not Capt. Kinney got the Knobbers to resolve that the thieves who had run the county into debt and stolen the money should be brought to justice. The thieves escaped by adding another crime to the record of Taney county—that of arson.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TANEY COUNTY COURT HOUSE BURNED.

After the lynching of the Taylor boys, the Bald Knobbers held a number of public meetings, at which the condition of affairs in the county was discussed. The public meetings always followed secret meetings on the knob. At one of these, held soon after the lynching, a petition was drawn up and signed praying the Circuit Court to appoint a man of known integrity living in another county to examine the Taney county books. The late Judge Geiser heard the petition and granted it. Along in November, 1885, the man appointed went down to Forsyth to get an idea of the amount of time required for the job, and then appointed a day early in January when the investigation should begin. The ring of county officers, according to the Knobbers, consisted of County Clerk Thomas A. Layton and his assistant, Sampson, Sheriff John Mosley, Prosecuting Attorney T. C. Spelling, and County Judge J. J. Reynolds. These men said they were very glad to have the stranger examine the books, because it would show that the county affairs had been honestly administered, and thus the Bald Knobber slanders would be squelched.

But the investigation was never allowed to take place. On the night of Sunday, Dec. 19, 1885, the floors and stairway of the building were saturated with kerosene oil and a fire was built in a closet under the stairway. The fire was probably started at about 11 o'clock. At midnight some citizen was awakened by an unexpected light that shone in at his bedroom window, and on looking out saw flames bursting from every window on the north side of the building. Before very many people arrived the roof was in flames.

Among the first to reach the building was Thomas A. Layton, the clerk. He burst in a window on the south side of the building, and although the room was all on fire got out one book that happened to be lying on the table near that window. It was an abstract of the titles of the lands in Taney county and the private property of the man who rescued it. The Bald Knobbers say that strange things do happen in Taney county, and that one of the strangest of them is the circumstance that put so valuable a book in so convenient a location.

Everything else in the building was destroyed. There was nothing left to investigate, Taney county must pay her debt, and she is paying it.

CHAPTER VII.

A NO-ACCOUNT KILLING.

Meantime another man had been killed. He was an opponent of the Bald Knobbers while his slayer was a deputy sheriff who had been induced to join the organization. The Mercer family lived on Nubbin Ridge, not far from the old home of the Taylor boys, who were lynched by the Knobbers. They were accused of stealing and a variety of petty offences. Warrants were issued for two of them on a charge of disturbing public worship.

Deputy Sheriff Arter Kissel went to the cabin to arrest them. Only one of the family, Buck Mercer, was at home. Kissel tells the story of what followed. Mercer can't; he's dead.

"Mercer saw me coming down the hallway, and got around behind the front door with a double-barrelled shotgun. So I dodged around the house to get the drop on him through the back door. Mercer heard me running, and then just about that time he found that he had made a mistake in his gun. The one he had was not loaded. The other one leaned against the wall near the back door. He dropped the unloaded gun and ran for the other just as I reached the back door. But I was too quick for him, and shot him through the breast. He died at once."

As Kissee was an officer, no investigation was held. Mercer's friends buried him in the back yard. Some of the Knobbers sent word to the other Mercer boy to come in and take his chances on a trial or hang without one. He came in, and was fined $25.

"The matter made no stir," said Editor De Long, when asked about it. "I had forgotten to tell you about it. It was a no-account affair."

CHAPTER VIII.

ANDREW COGGBURN SHOT TO DEATH BY THE KNOBBER CHIEF.

The stranger who visits Taney county and talks to the Bald Knobbers and no one else will gather the idea that the organization, if not exactly a lawful one, was wholly beneficent in its effects on the county. The Bald Knobbers say that their only acts in that county were the frightening of young Hervale, the lynching of the Taylor boys, and the procuring of a man to investigate the county books. They had intended to do more, but circumstances arose which, to their regret, prevented their doing anything more. They say they never whipped any one and never ordered any one to leave the county. By this they mean that they never did these things upon a formal order by the chief Knobber and his council. They just did it informally. A gang of a suitable size for the job would get together and make matters uncomfortable for the citizen who was obnoxious to them, and then ride away and disperse.

Among the citizens who became obnoxious to the Knobbers were the Coggburn boys, sons of John Coggburn, at the time the Master of the Masonic Lodge of the county, and a man of excellent repute. The boys were good average boys, even according to the Bald Knobbers. Lots of Knobbers had boys quite as bad, and some had worse boys. Like all other Taney county boys, they carried concealed weapons, and sometimes fired their guns in the public highway, and yelled in cowboy fashion, contrary to the statute in such case made and provided. Worse than this, however, by the Bald Knobber mind, was their avowed hostility to that order. They even threatened to shoot if attacked. The Bald Knobbers determined to have the boys arrested and punished for carrying concealed weapons and threatening the lives of citizens. A warrant was easily obtained, and a squad of Knobbers went with the officer to make the arrest. The boys resisted, and were victorious. A larger and more discreet squad got the drop on the Coggburns, and the two were taken before a magistrate and fined $25 each, which they paid. This was in the summer of 1885.

At about this time Capt. Kinney made up his mind to try the gentle suasion of the Christian religion, in addition to the halter and revolver, in his efforts to promote the moral and intellectual growth of his neighbors. There had never been a Sunday school in Taney county before 1886, and Capt. Kinney organized the first one. It was at the Oak Grove Church, not far from Forsyth. Capt. Kinney was the superintendent. Among his pupils were the Coggburn boys. The Knobbers say the boys went there solely to scoff. The rest of the community deny this. The Coggburns say, however, that they did not see much reflection or solemnity about a Sunday school conducted by a man who had hanged two men unlawfully, shot no one knew how many more to death, and whose chief claim to respectability lay in the clearness of his vision when looking at the sins of others.

That the Coggburns acted irreverently is not disputed. And Robert Coggburn made blasphemous responses during the service. This was during the early and conservative days of the organization, or both boys would have been severely whipped before Monday morning.

A few weeks later a Sunday school convention was held that lasted all day. The Coggburns had been warned to keep away, but they were not easily frightened. While every one else there was dressed in store clothes, the Coggburns were in their shirt sleeves. The boys carried no weapons themselves, but their sisters and sweethearts carried several revolvers under their skirts for them to use in case "Old Kinney got mad at them little rules."

When Capt. Kinney reached the church and opened the door he found hanging on the inside a coat with a little coffin on it and a piece of paper with a rude sketch of a skull and crossbones pinned beneath it. Inside of the coffin wash a bit of paper directed "To Old Kinney," and marked with the "Pluto" and "Death in his favorite rôle." A buckshot was wrapped in the paper.

The people crowded into the building, and Kinney showed the coffin and papers to every one. The Coggburns snickered audibly. They called it a good practical joke on the Bald Knobber chief. Going to the pulpit, Capt. Kinney pointed his finger at Andrew Coggburn, and said:

"The man who did that is here, and he will need a box before I do."

There was no claptrap about that. It was a promise that Kinney would kill Andy Coggburn at the first opportunity that in Taney county ethics, would warrant the deed. Every one so understood it, and had Coggburn shot Kinney dead at any moment thereafter, provided he did not shoot from the brush, that threat would have cleared him before any Missouri court of justice. The threat proved to be a prophecy as well as a warning.

During the exercises of the morning Capt. Kinney made the little coffin a text and scorched the boys verbally for their sins. There was a novel spectacle at the afternoon services of this Sunday school convention. Teachers and pupils came carrying loaded guns and revolvers in the right hand and the Gospel in the left. There were two mottos on the walls of the church. One read "Peace on Earth and Good Will Toward Men," the other, "God is Love." A double-barrelled shotgun leaned against the wall beneath the first, and a Kentucky rifle with a broken stock that had been mended with wire was beneath the other.

There were no converts made at this meeting.

"Of course we watched each other pretty closely as time went on when he was in the neighborhood," said Capt. Kinney, in talking of the case afterward. Had this occurred in the Big Sandy region in Kentucky or West Virginia, one or the other would have been shot to death from behind the brush. Business is done in that way here. The Ozark mountaineer is not a coward by any means, although an occasional cowardly murder has been committed. Kinney and the Coggburns were of reckless courage.

They met at last after months of watchfulness, on the night of Feb. 26, 1886, at the same place—the Oak Grove church. Andrew Coggburn and Sam Snapp, a chum, were in attendance at the meeting. A Bald Knobber parson was in the pulpit preparing for the service. Seeing Coggburn there, a Bald Knobber ran away to tell Deputy Sheriffs M. and M. Branson that Coggburn was there if they wanted to arrest him on a warrant they had for him for shooting at a man named Andrew Watson some time before. The Bransons were told that Coggburn was armed.

At this one of the Bransons sent his son to tell Kinney. The lad met Kinney a short distance away, and Kinney at once went home and got his revolver. There are two stories about what followed. The opponents of the Bald Knobbers say that Kinney sent in and called Coggburn out. The Knobbers say that Coggburn heard that Kinney was coming and slipped out with Sam Snapp, and lay in wait in the shadow of the building (it was a moonlight night) for the Knobber chief.

The undisputed facts are that Coggburn came out of the church with Snapp as Kinney was hitching his horse. Kinney walked toward the church door revolver in hand, while Coggburn walked out into the moonlight. Coggburn stepped to one side of the path and said aloud:

"Who is it?"

"Now's yer chance," said some one.

"Hold up your hands!" thundered Kinney, levelling his revolver.

Coggburn turned his left side partly toward the Knobber chief, threw up his left hand, and with his right drew his revolver. It was a lightning motion, but Kinney's finger was quicker. Pressing the trigger, the Knobber chief sent a bullet into Coggburn's left breast, through his heart and out under the right shoulder. The young man was going partly forward, but the impact of the bullet straightened him up, and over he went on his back, dead before he struck the ground. As he fell his revolver, thrown by his swaying right arm, flew from his grasp and struck on the gravel twenty feet away behind him.

The parson in the church was just giving out the first hymn. It began:

Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear.

The sweet hour of prayer was interrupted by the report of Kinney's pistol, and a moment later Sam Snapp walked into the church with his hands up and the muzzle of Kinney's still smoking pistol close to his head. Kinney had held him up the moment Coggburn dropped.

"That was one of the most interesting passages of my life," said the Bald Knobber in speaking of the homicide afterward. He "came clear," as they say here easily. A Bald Knobber Justice of the Peace impanelled a Bald Knobber Coroner's jury. The Bald Knobber chief told his story, not defiantly at over the butt of a shotgun, as his opponents have since said, but in regretful tones as became a Sunday school superintendent under the circumstances.

Sam Snapp was not called as a witness. He would not have heard the call had it been made. He was not in the country. He had involuntarily become an assisted emigrant. The Knobbers provided the assistance.

The Knobber jury heard Kinney's story respectfully and sympathetically.

"He jest done had I," said the Knobber Justice when the recital was ended, and thereupon the Knobber jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide.

It is an interesting matter of fact that the Knobbers, many of whom were members of the Masonic order were able to wield enough influence in the lodge to expel Worshipful Master John Coggburn from the order because he bitterly denounced the murder of his son and the acquittal of the murderer. The ties that bound the Bald Knobbers were stronger than the ties that bound the Masons in a land where Masons often do go afoot and barefoot because it is necessary to help a brother Mason.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MILITIA.

The murder of Coggburn and the acquittal of Kinney worked up the courage or rather the fears of those opposed to the Bald Knobbers to a point where they determined to organize an opposition association, which should be formed according to the laws of the State and with the sanction of the State authorities. There is no doubt in the minds of both Christian and Taney county people to whom the reporter talked that some of the men who determined to organize a militia company were thieves who had robbed the county, and were anxious to put Kinney down lest he should discover the bad burned the Court House. On the other hand, there were men in it who believed that the condition of the county had been worse since the Bald Knobbers had organized than it was before, that more crimes had been committed and more blood shed, and that matters were likely to grow worse rather than better. The men accused of the stealing took the lead, however.

A secret meeting had been held in the store of J. S. B. Berry, a violent anti-Knobber, who has since figured in a typical Ozark Mountain romance. The meeting resolved simply to organize a militia company. This was at about the time Buck Mercer was killed, but nothing more was done about it until after Andrew Coggburn was shot by Kinney.

At this the militia, as they have since been called, got together again. Sixty men signed an agreement to form a militia company, and William Miles, Sr., was made Captain of it. Among its members were the Rev. Messrs. Haworth and Everett, Disciple ministers, and Dennison, a Methodist. A petition to Gov. Marmaduke was drawn up, in which it was alleged that "Taney county is now enjoying [sic] a reign of terror from the depredations of a band of men organized under the name of Bald Knobbers, who ride about the country at night and terrorize good citizens, many of whom have been compelled to abandon their homes and flee from the country to save their lives."

Continuing, the petition set forth in detail the acts of Bald Knobbers in Taney county, with statements colored by prejudice somewhat. The law-abiding citizens, said the petition, had been compelled to organize a militia company for the protection of the citizens of the county from the depredations of a mob and for the enforcement of the civil law.

Would the Governor sanction the organization and supply it with arms from the State arsenal?

He would see about it.

In spite of the attempts at secrecy, the Bald Knobbers knew all about this organization. There was a Bald Knobber in it as a spy. As soon as Judge Reynolds left town to carry the petition to Jefferson City to the Governor, the Knobbers held a public meeting in Forsyth not as Knobbers, but as citizens, qualified voters, and taxpayers. They resolved to "earnestly protest against the organization of a military company (composed as it is), believing that it will have a tendency to incite turmoil and cause serious trouble."

There is not the least doubt that the Knobbers had reasons for this belief. One reason was that they would have felt bound to turn in and kill off the company at the first opportunity after it was organized. Another reason was, according to Lewis Robinson, a member of the militia company, that the military company was organized for the purpose of killing off the Bald Knobbers. They were going to be moderate about it, however—that is, moderate according to Ozark ideas. Capt. Kinney, Deputy