by the thumping of heavy feet in the hall, and the unmistakable odor of perspiring negroes. They had begun to ransack the house on tours of inspection. The poor woman's head dropped and she fell to the floor in a dead swoon.

There was a sudden charge as of an armed host, the sound of blows, a wild scramble, and the house was cleared. Aunt Eve with a fire shovel, Charlie with a broken hoe handle, and Dick with a big blacksnake whip had cleared the air.

Aunt Eve stood on the front doorstep shaking the shovel at the crowd.

"Des put yo big flat hoofs in dis house ergin! I'll split yo heads wide open! You black cattle!"

"Dat we will!" railed Dick as he cracked the whip at a little negro passing.

Charlie ran into his mother's room to see what she was doing, and found her lying across the floor on her face.

"Aunt Eve, come quick, mama's dying!" he shouted.

They lifted her to the bed and Dick ran for the doctor.

Dr. Graham looked very grave when he had completed his examination.

"Come here, my boy; I must tell you some sad news."

Charlie's big brown eyes glanced up with a startled look into the doctor's face.

"Don't tell me she's dying, doctor. I can't stand it."

The doctor took his hand. "You're getting to be a man now, my son; you will soon be 13. You must be brave. Your mother will not live through the night."

The boy sank on his knees beside the still figure, tenderly clasped her thin hand in his, and began to kiss it slowly. He would kiss it, lay his wet cheek against it and try to warm it with his hot young blood.

It was about 9 o'clock when she opened her eyes with a smile and looked into his face.

"Oh! mama, do try to live! Don't leave me," he sobbed in quivering tones as he leaned over and kissed her lips. She smiled faintly again.

"Yes, I must go, dear. I am tired. Your papa is waiting for me. I see him smiling and beckoning to me now. I must go."

A sob shook the boy with an agony no words could frame.

"There, there, dear, don't," she soothingly said; "you will grow to be a brave, strong man. You will fight this battle out, and win back our home and bring your own bride here in the far away days of sunshine and success I see for you. She will love you, and the flowers will blossom on the lawn again. But I am tired. Kiss me—I must go."

Her heart fluttered on for a while, but she never spoke again.

At 10 o'clock Mrs. Durham tenderly lifted the boy from the bedside, kissed him and said as she led him to his room:

"She's done with suffering, Charlie. You are going to live with me now, and let me love you and be your mother."

* * * *

The preacher had made a profound impression on his Boston congregation.

They were charmed by his simple, direct appeal to the heart. His fiery emphasis, impassioned dogmatic faith, his tenderness and the strange pathos of his voice swept them off their feet. At night the big church was crowded to the doors, and throngs were struggling in vain to gain admittance. At the close of the services he was overwhelmed with the expressions of gratitude and heartfelt sympathy with which they thanked him for his messages.

He was feasted and dined and taken out into the parks behind spanking teams, until his head was dizzy with the unaccustomed whirl.

The preacher went through it all with a heavy heart. Those beautiful homes with their rich carpets, handsome furniture, and those long lines of beautiful carriages in the parks made a contrast with the agony of universal ruin which he left at home that crushed his soul.

He hastened to tell the story of Mrs. Gaston to a genial old merchant, who had taken a great fancy to him.

A tear glistened in the old man's eye as he quickly rose.

"Come right down to my store. I'll get you a money order before the postoffice closes. I've got tickets for you to go to the Coliseum with me to-night and hear the music!—the great peace jubilee. We are celebrating the return of peace and prosperity and the preservation of the Union. It's the greatest musical festival the world ever saw."

The preacher was dazed with the sense of its sublimity and the pathetic tragedy of the South that lay back of its joy.

The great Coliseum, constructed for the purpose, seated over 40,000 people. Such a crowd he had never seen gathered together within one building. The soul of the orator in him leaped with divine power as he glanced over the swaying ocean of human faces. There were 12,000 trained voices in the chorus. He had dreamed of such music in heaven when countless hosts of angels should gather around God's throne. He had never expected to hear it on earth. He was transported with a rapture that thrilled and lifted him above the consciousness of time and sense.

They rendered masterpieces of all ages. The music continued hour after hour, day after day, night after night.

The grand chorus within the Coliseum was accompanied by the ringing of bells in the city and the firing of cannon on the Common, discharged in perfect time with the melody that rolled upward from those 12,000 voices and broke against the gates of heaven! When every voice was in full cry, and every instrument of music that man had ever devised throbbed in harmony, and a hundred anvils were ringing a chorus of steel in perfect time, Papa Rosa stepped forward on the great stage and in a voice that rang its splendid note of triumph over all like the trumpet of the archangel, sang the "Star Spangled Banner"!

Men and women fainted, and one woman died, unable to endure the strain. The preacher turned his head away and looked out of the window. A soft wind was blowing from the south. On its wings were borne to his heart the cry of the widow and orphan, the hungry and dying still being trampled to death by a war more terrible than the first, because it was waged against the unarmed, women and children, the wounded, the starving and the defenseless! He tried in vain to keep back the tears. Bending low, he put his face in his hands and cried like a child.

"God forgive them! They know not what they do!" he moaned.

The kindly old man by his side said nothing, supposing he was overcome by the grandeur of the music.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RALLY OF THE CLANSMEN.

When the preacher took the train in Boston for the South, his friendly merchant, a deacon, was by his side.

"Now, you put my name and address down in your note book, Willian Crane. And don't forget about us."

"I'll never forget you, deacon."

"Say, I just as well tell you," whispered the deacon bending close, "we are not going to allow you to stay down South. We'll be down after you before long—just as well be packed up!"

The preacher smiled, looked out of the car window, and made no reply.

"Well, good-by, doctor, good-by. God bless you and your work and your people! You've brought me a message warm from God's heart. I'll never forget it."

"Good-by, deacon."

As the train whirled southward through the rich populous towns and cities of the North, again the sharp contrast with the desolation of his own land cut him like a knife. He thought of Legree and Haley, Perkins and Tim Shelby robbing widows and orphans and sweeping the poverty-stricken Southland with riot, pillage, murder and brigandage, and posing as the representatives of the conscience of the North. And his heart was heavy with sorrow.

On reaching Hambright he was thunderstruck at the news of the sale of Mrs. Gaston's place and her tragic death.

"Why, my dear, I sent the money to her on the first Monday I spent in Boston!" he declared to his wife.

"It never reached her."

"Then Dave Haley, the dirty slave driver, has held that letter. I'll see to this." He hurried to the postoffice.

"Mr. Haley," he exclaimed, "I sent a money order letter to Mrs. Gaston from Boston on Monday a week ago."

"Yes sir," answered Haley in his blandest manner, "it got here the day after the sale."

"You're an infamous liar!" shouted the preacher.

"Of course! Of course! All Union men are liars to hear rebel traitors talk."

"I'll report you to Washington for this rascality."

"So do, so do. More'n likely the President and the Postoffice Department 'll be glad to have this information from so great a man."

As the preacher was leaving the posoffice he encountered the Hon. Tim Shelby dressed in the height of fashion, his silk hat shinifg in the sun, and his eyes rolling with joy of living. The preacher stepped squarely in front of Tim.

"Tim Shelby, I hear you have moved into Mrs. Gaston's home and are using her furniture. By whose authority do you dare such insolence?"

"By authority of the law, sir. Mrs. Gaston died intestate. Her effects are in the hands of our County Administrator, Mr. Ezra Perkins. I'll be pleased to receive you, sir, any time you would like to call!" said Tim with a bow.

"I'll call in due time," replied the preacher, looking Tim straight in the eye.

Haley had been peeping through the window, watching and listening to this encounter.

"These charmin' preachers think they own this county, brother Shelby," laughed Haley as he grasped Tim's outstretched hand.

"Yes, they are the curse of the State. I wish to God they had succeeded in burning him alive that night the boys tried it. They'll get him later on. Brother Haley, he's a dangerous man. He must be put out of the way, or we'll never have smooth sailing in this county."

"I believe you're right; he's just been in here cussin' me about that letter of the widder's that didn't get to her in time. He thinks he can run the postoffice."

"Well, we'll show him this county's in the hands of the loyal!" added Tim.

"Heard the news from Charleston?"

"Heard it? I guess I have. I talked with the commanding general in Charleston two weeks ago. He told me then he was going to set aside that decision of the Supreme Court in a ringing order permitting the marriage of negroes to white women and commanding its enforcement on every military post. I see he's done it in no uncertain words."

"It's a great day, brother, for the world. There'll be no more color line."

"Yes, times have changed," said Tim with a triumphant smile. "I guess our white hot-bloods will sweat and bluster and swear a little when they read that order. But we've got the bayonets to enforce it. They'd just as well cool down."

"That's the stuff," said Haley, taking a fresh chew of tobacco.

"Let 'em squirm. They're flat on their backs. We are on top, and we are going to stay on top. I expect to lead a fair bride into my house before another year and have poor white aristocrats to tend my lawn." Tim worked his ears and looked up at the ceiling in a dreamy sort of way.

"That'll be a sight, won't it!" exclaimed Haley with delight. "Where's that scoundrel Neise that lived with Mrs. Gaston?"

"Oh, we fixed him," said Tim. "The black rascal wouldn't join the league, and wouldn't vote with the people, and showed fight after we beat him half to death, so we put a levy of $50 on his cabin, sold him out, and every piece of furniture and every rag of clothes we could get hold of. He'll leave the country now, or we'll kill him next time."

"You ought to 'a' killed him the first time, and then the job would ha' been over."

"Oh, we'll have the country in good shape in a little while, and don't you forget it."

The news of the order of the military commandant of "District No. 2," comprising the Carolinas, abrogating the decisions of the North Carolina Supreme Court, forbidding the intermarriage of negroes and whites, fell like a bombshell on Campbell County. The people had not believed that the military authorities would dare to go the length of attempting to force social equality.

This order from Charleston was not only explicit, its language was peculiarly emphatic. It apparently commanded intermarriage, and ordered the military to enforce the command at the point of the bayonet.

The feelings of the people were wrought to the pitch of fury. It needed but a word from a daring leader, and a massacre of every negro, scalawag and carpet-bagger in the county might have followed. The Rev. John Durham was busy day and night seeking to allay excitement and prevent an uprising of the white population.

Along with the announcement of this initiatory order, came the startling news that Simon Legree, whose infamy was known from end to end of the State, was to be the next Governor, and that the Hon. Tim Shelby was a candidate for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Legree was in Washington at the time on a mission to secure a stand of twenty thousand rifles from the Secretary of War, with which to arm the negro troops he was drilling for the approaching election. The grant was made and Legree came back in triumph with his rifles.

Relief for the ruined people was now a hopeless dream. Black despair was clutching at every white man's heart. The taxpayers had held a convention and sent their representatives to Washington exposing the monstrous thefts that were being committed under the authority of the government by the organized band of thieves who were looting the State. But the thieves were the pets of politicians high in power. The committee of taxpayers were insulted and sent home to pay their taxes.

And then a thing happened in Hambright that brought matters to a sudden crisis.

The Hon. Tim Shelby as school commissioner had printed the notices for an examination of school teachers for Campbell County. An enormous tax had been levied and collected by the county for this purpose, but no school had been opened. Tim announced, however, that the school would be surely opened the first Monday in October.

Miss Mollie Graham, the pretty niece of the old doctor, was struggling to support a blind mother and four younger children. Her father and brother had been killed in the war. Their house had been sold for taxes, and they were required now to pay Tim Shelby ten dollars a month for rent. When she saw that school notice her heart gave a leap. If she could only get the place, it would save them from beggary.

She fairly ran to the preacher to get his advice.

"Certainly, child, try for it. It's humiliating to ask such a favor of that black ape, but if you can save your loved ones, do it."

So with trembling hand she knocked at Tim's door. He required all applicants to apply personally at his house. Tim met her with the bows and smirks of a dancing master.

"Delighted to see your pretty face this morning, Miss Graham," he cried enthusiastically.

The girl blushed and hesitated at the door.

"Just walk right into the parlor; I'll join you in a moment."

She bravely set her lips and entered.

"And now what can I do for you, Miss Graham?"

"I've come to apply for a teacher's place in the school."

"Ah, indeed, I'm glad to know that. There is only one difficulty. You must be loyal. Your people were rebels and the new government has determined to have only loyal teachers."

"I think I am loyal enough to the old flag now that our people have surrendered," said the girl.

"Yes, yes, I dare say, but do you think you can accept the new regime of government and society which we are now establishing in the South? We have abolished the color line. Would you have a mixed school if assigned one?"

"I think I'd prefer to teach a negro school outright to a mixed one," she said after a moment's hesitation.

Tim continued, "You know we are living in a new world. The supreme law of the land has broken down every barrier of race and we are henceforth to be one people. The struggle for existence knows no race or color. It's a struggle now for bread. I'm in a position to be of great help to you and your family if you will only let me."

The girl suddenly rose, impelled by some resistless instinct.

"May I have the place then?" she asked, approaching the door.

"Well, now, you know it depends really altogether on my fancy. I'll tell you what I'll do. You're still full of silly prejudices. I can see that. But if you will overcome them enough to do one thing for me as a test, that will cost you nothing and of which the world will never be the wiser, I'll give you the place and more; I'll remit $10 a month rent you're now paying. Will you do it?"

"What is it?" the girl asked with pale, quivering lips.

"Let me kiss you—once!" he whispered.

With a scream she sprang past him out of the door, ran like a deer across the lawn, and fell sobbing in her mother's arms when she reached home.

The next day the town was unusually quiet. Tim had business with the commandant of the company of regulars still quartered at Hambright. He spent most of the day with him and walked about the streets ostentatiously showing his familiarity with the corporal who accompanied him. A guard of three soldiers was stationed about Tim's house for two nights and then withdrawn.

The next night at 12 o'clock 200 white-robed horses assembled around the old home of Mrs. Gaston where Tim was sleeping. The moon was full and flooded the lawn with silver glory. On those horses sat 200 white-robed silent men, whose close-fitting hood disguises looked like the mail helmets of ancient knights.

It was the work of a moment to seize Tim and bind him across a horse's back. Slowly the grim procession moved to the courthouse square.

When the sun rose next morning the lifeless body of Tim Shelby was dangling from a rope tied to the iron rail of the balcony of the courthouse. His neck was broken and his body was hanging low—scarcely three feet from the ground. His thick lips had been split with a sharp knife and from his teeth hung this placard:

"The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race to negro lips that dare pollute with words the womanhood of the South. K. K. K."

And the Ku Klux Klan was master of Campbell County.

The origin of this law and order league which sprang up like magic in a night and nullified the programme of Congress, though backed by an army of a million veteran soldiers, is yet a mystery.

The simple truth is, it was a spontaneous and restless uprising of clansmen of Highland origin living along the Appalachian Mountains and foothills of the South, and it appeared almost simultaneously in every Southern State, produced by the same terrible conditions.

It was the answer to their foes of a proud and indomitable race of men driven to the wall. In the hour of their defeat they laid down their arms and accepted in good faith the results of the war. And then, when unarmed and defenseless, a group of pothouse politicians for political ends renewed the war and attempted to wipe out the civilization of the South.

The Invisible Empire of White-robed Anglo-Saxon Knights was simply the old answer of organized manhood to organized crime. Its purpose was to bring order out of chaos, protect the weak and defenseless, the widows and orphans of brave men who had died for their country, to drive from power the thieves who were robbing the people, redeem the commonwealth from infamy and re-establish civilization.

Within one week from its appearance, life and property were as safe as in any Northern community.

When the negroes came home from their league meeting one night they ran terror stricken past long rows of white horsemen. Not a word was spoken, but that was the last meeting the "Union League of America" ever held in Hambright.

Every negro found guilty of a misdemeanor was promptly thrashed and warned against its recurrence. The sudden appearance of this host of white cavalry grasping at their throats with the grip of cold steel struck the heart of Legree and his followers with the chill of a deadly fear.

It meant inevitable ruin, overthrow and a prison cell for the "loyal" statesmen who were with him in his efforts to maintain the new "republican form of government" in North Carolina.

At the approaching election, this white terror could intimidate every negro in the State unless he could arm them all, suspend the writ of habeas corpus and place every county under the strictest martial law.

Washington was besieged by a terrified army of the "loyal," who saw their occupation threatened. They begged for more troops, more guns for negro militia, and for the re-establishment of universal martial law until the votes were properly counted.

But the great statesmen laughed them to scorn as a set of weak cowards and fools, frightened by negro stories of ghosts. It was incredible to them that the crushed, poverty stricken and unarmed South could dare challenge the power of the national Government. They were sent back with scant comfort.

The night that Ezra Perkins and Haley got back from Washington, where they had gone summoned by Legree and Hogg, to testify to the death of Tim Shelby, they saw a sight that made their souls quake.

At 10 o'clock the Ku Klux Klan held a formal parade through the streets of Hambright. How the news was circulated nobody knew, but it seemed everybody in the county knew of it. The streets were lined with thousands of people, who had poured into town that afternoon.

At exactly 10 o'clock a bugle call was heard on the hill to the west of the town and the muffled tread of soft shod horses came faintly to their ears. Women stood on the sidewalks, holding their babies and smiling, and children were laughing and playing in the streets.

They rode four abreast in perfect order slowly through the town. It was utterly impossible to recognize a man or a horse, so complete was the simple disguise of the white sheet which blanketed the horse, fitting closely over his head and ears and falling gracefully over his form toward the ground.

No citizen of Hambright was in the procession. They were all in the streets watching it pass. There were fifteen hundred men in line. But the reports next day all agreed in fixing the number at over 5000.

Perkins and Haley had watched it from a darkened room.

"Brother Haley, that's the end! Lord! I wish I was back in Michigan, jail er no jail," said Perkins, mopping the perspiration from his brow.

"We'll have ter dig out purty quick, I reckon," answered Haley.

"And to think them fools at Washington laughed at us!" cried Perkins, clenching his fists.

And that night mothers and fathers gathered their children to bed with a sense of grateful security they had not felt through years of war and turmoil.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW CIVILIZATION WAS SAVED.

The success of the Ku Klux Klan was so complete its organizers were dazed. Its appeal to ignorance and superstition of the negro at once reduced the race to obedience and order. Its threat against the scalawag and carpet-bagger struck terror to their craven souls and the "Union League," "Red Strings" and "Heroes of America" went to pieces with incredible rapidity.

Major Stuart Dameron, the chief of the Klan in Campbell County, was holding a conference with the Rev. John Durham in his study.

"Doctor, our work has succeeded beyond our wildest dream."

"Yes, and I thank God we can breathe freely if only for a moment, major. The danger now lies in our success. We are necessarily playing with fire."

"I know it, and it requires my time day and night to prevent reckless men from disgracing us.'

"It will not be necessary to enforce the death penalty against any other man in this county, major. The execution of Tim Shelby was absolutely necessary at the time and it has been sufficient."

"I agree with you. I've impressed this matter on the master of every lodge, but some of them are growing reckless."

"Who are they?"

"Young Allan McLeod for one. He is a dare devil, and only 18 years old.

"He's a troublesome boy. I don't seem to have any influence with him. But I think Mrs. Durham can manage him. He seems to think a great deal of her and in spite of his wild habits he comes regularly to her Sunday school class."

"I hope she can bring him to his senses."

"Leave him to me then a while. We will see what can be done."

* * * *

Hogg's Legislature promptly declared the Scotch-Irish hill counties in a state of insurrection, passed a militia bill and the Governor issued a proclamation suspending the writ of habeas corpus in these counties.

Fearing the effects of negro militia in the hill districts he surprised Hambright by suddenly marching into the courthouse square a regiment of white mountain guerrillas recruited from the outlaws of East Tennessee and commanded by a noted desperado, Colonel Henry Berry. The regiment had two pieces of field artillery.

It was impossible for them to secure evidence against any member of the Klan unless by intimidation of some coward who could be made to confess. Not a disguise had ever been penetrated. It was the rule of the order for its decrees to be executed in the district issuing the decree by the lodge furthest removed in the county from the scene. In this way not a man or a horse was ever identified.

Henceforth there could be but one issue, are you a white man or a negro?

They declared there was but one question to be settled:

"Shall the future American be an Anglo-Saxon or a mulatto?"

These determined, impassioned men believed that this question was more important than any theory of tariff or finance and that it was larger than the South, or even the nation, and held in its solution the brightest hopes of the progress of the human race. And they believed that they were ordained of God in this crisis to give this question its first authoritative answer.

The State burst into a flame of excitement that fused in its white heat the whole Anglo-Saxon race.

In vain Hogg marched and countermarched his twenty thousand State troops. They only added fuel to the fire. If they arrested a man he became forthwith a hero and was given an ovation. They sent bands of music and played at the jail doors, and the ladies filled the jail with every delicacy that could tempt the appetite or appeal to the senses.

Hogg and Legree were in a panic of fear with the certainty of defeat, exposure and a felon's cell yawning before them.

Two days before the election the prayer meeting was held at 8 o'clock in the Baptist church at Hambright. It was the usual mid-week service, but the attendance was unusually large.

After the meeting the preacher, Major Dameron and eleven men quietly walked back to the church and assembled in the pastor's study. The door opened at the rear of the church and could be approached by a side street.

"Gentlemen," said Major Dameron, "I've asked you here to-night to deliver to you the most important order I have ever given, and to have Dr. Durham as our chaplain to aid me in impressing on you its great urgency."

"We're ready for orders, Chief," said young Ambrose Kline, the deacon's son.

"You are to call out every troop of the Klan in full force the night before the election. You are to visit every negro in the county and warn every one as he values his life not to approach the polls at this election. Those who come will be allowed to vote without molestation. All cowards will stay at home. Any man, black or white, who can be scared out of his ballot is not fit to have one. Back of every ballot is the red blood of the man that votes. The ballot is force. This is simply a test of manhood. It will be enough to show who is fit to rule the State. As the masters of the eleven township lodges of the Klan, you are the sole guardians of society to-day. When a civilized government has been restored your work will be done."

The group of leaders left the church with enthusiasm and on the following night they carried out their instructions to the letter.

The election was remarkably quiet. Thousands of soldiers were used at the polls by Hogg's orders. But they seemed to make no impression on the determined men who marched up between their files and put the ballots in the box.

Legree's ticket was buried beneath an avalanche. The new "Conservative" party carried every county in the State save twelve and elected one hundred and six members of the new Legislature out of a total of one hundred and twenty.

The next day hundreds of carpet-bagger thieves fled to the North, and Legree led the procession.

Legree had on deposit in New York $2,000,000, and the total amount of his part of the thefts he had engineered reached $5,000,000. He opened an office on Wall street, bought a seat in the Stock Exchange and became one of the most daring and successful group of robbers who preyed on the industries of the nation.

The new Legislature appointed a Fraud Commission, which uncovered the infamies of the Legree regime, but every thief had escaped. They promptly impeached the Governor and removed him from office, and the old commonwealth once more lifted up her head and took her place in the ranks of civilized communities.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OLD AND THE NEW NEGRO.

Nelse was elated over the defeat and dissolution of the leagues that had persecuted him with such malignant hatred. When the news of the election came he was still in bed suffering from his wounds. He had received an internal injury that threatened to prove fatal.

"Dar now!" he cried, sitting up in bed, "Ain't I done tole you no kinky-headed niggers gwine ter run dis gov'ment!"

"Keep still dar, ole man, you'll be faintin' ergin," worried Aunt Eve.

"Na, honey, I'se feelin' better. Gwine ter git up and meander down town en ax dem niggers how's de Ku-Kluxes comin' on dese days."

In spite of all Eve could say he crawled out of bed, fumbled into his clothes and started down town, leaning heavily on his cane. He had gone about a block when he suddenly reeled and fell. Eve was watching him from the door, and was quickly by his side. He died that afternoon at 3 o'clock. He regained consciousness before the end, and asked Eve for his banjo.

He put it lovingly into the hands of Charlie Gaston, who stood by the bed crying.

"You keep 'er, honey. You lub 'er talk better'n anybody in de worl', en 'member Nelse when you hear 'er moan en sigh. En when she talk short en sassy en make 'em all gin ter shuffle, dat's me, too. Dat's me got back in 'er."

Charlie Gaston rode with Aunt Eve to the cemetery. He walked back home through the fields with Dick.

"I wouldn' cry 'bout er ole nigger!" said Dick looking into his reddened eyes.

"Can't help it. He was my best friend."

"Hain't I wid you?"

"Yes, but you ain't Nelse."

"Well, I'll stan' by you des de same."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DANGER OF PLAYING WITH FIRE.

The following Saturday the Rev. John Durham preached at a crossroads schoolhouse in the woods about ten miles from Hambright. He preached every Saturday in the year at such a mission station. He was fond of taking Charlie with him on these trips. There was an unusually large crowd in attendance, and the preacher was much pleased at this evidence of interest. It had been a hard community to impress. At the close of the services, while the preacher was shaking hands with the people, Charlie elbowed his way rapidly among the throng to his side.

"Doctor, there's a nigger man out at the buggy says he wants to see you quick," he whispered.

"All right, Charlie, in a minute."

"Says to come right now. It's a matter of life and death, and he don't want to come into the crowd."

A troubled look flashed over the preacher's face and he hastily followed the boy, fearing now a sinister meaning to his great crowd.

"Preacher," said the negro looking timidly around, "de Ku-Klux is gwine ter kill ole Uncle Rufus Lattimore ter-night. I come ter see ef you can't save him. He ain't done nuthin' in God's worl 'cept he wouldn' pull his waggin clear outen de road one day fur dat red-headed Allan McLeod ter pass, en he cussed 'im black and blue en tole 'im he gwine git eben wid 'im."

"How do you know this?"

"I wuz huntin' in de woods en hear a racket en clim' er tree. En de Ku-Kluxes had der meetin' right under de tree. En I hear ev'ry word."

"Who was leading the crowd?"

"Dat Allan McLeod en Hose Norman."

"Where are they going to meet?"

"Right at de crossroads here at de schoolhouse at midnight. Dey sont er man atter plenty er licker en dey gwine ter git drunk fust. I was erfeered ter come ter de meetin' case I see er lot er de boys in de crowd. Fur de Lawd sake, preacher, do sáve de ole man. He des es harmless ez er chile. En I'm gwine ter marry his gal, en she des plum crazy. We'se got five men ter fight fur 'im, but I spec dey kill 'em all ef you can't he'p us."

"Are you one of General Worth's negroes?"

"Yassir. I run erway up here 'bout dat Free'mens Bureau trick dey put me up ter, but I'se larned better sense now."

"Well, Sam, you go to Uncle Rufus and tell him not to be afraid. I'll stop this business before night."

The negro stepped into the woods and disappeared.

"Charlie, we must hurry," said the preacher, springing in his buggy. He was driving a beautiful bay mare, a gift from a Kentucky friend. Her sleek, glistening skin and big round veins showed her fine blood.

"Well, Nancy, it's your life now or a man's or maybe a dozen. You must take us to Hambright in fifty minutes over these rough hills!" cried the preacher. And he gave her the reins.

The mare bounded forward with a rush that sent four spinning circles of sand and dust from each wheel. She had seldom felt the lines slacken across her beautiful back except in some great emergency. She swung past buggies and wagons without a pause. The people wondered why the preacher was in such a hurry. Over long sand stretches of heavy road the mare flew in a cloud of dust. The preacher's lips were firmly set and a scowl on his brow. They had made five miles without slackening up.

The mare was now a mass of white foam, her big-veined nostrils wide open and quivering, and her eyes flashing with the fire of proud ancestry. The slackened lines on her back seemed to her an insufferable insult!

"Doctor, you'll kill Nancy!" pleaded Charlie.

"Can't help it, son, there's a lot of drunken devils, masquerading as Ku-Klux, going to kill a man to-night. If we can't reach Major Dameron's in time for him to get a lot of men and stop them there'll be a terrible tragedy."

On the mare flew, lifting her proud, sensitive head higher and higher, while her heart beat her foaming flanks like a trip-hammer. She never slackened her speed for the ten miles, but dashed up to Major Dameron's gate at sundown, just forty-nine minutes from the time she started. The preacher patted her dripping neck.

"Good, Nancy! good! I believe you've got a soul!"

She stood with her head still high, pawing the ground.

"Major Dameron, I've driven my mare here at a killing speed to tell you that young McLeod and Hose Norman have a crowd of desperadoes organized to kill old Rufus Lattimore to-night. You must get enough men together, and get there in time to stop them. Sam Worth overheard their plot, knows every one of them, and there will be a battle if they attempt it."

"My God!" exclaimed the major.

"You haven't a minute to spare. They are already loading up on moonshine whisky."

"Dr. Durham, this is the end of the Ku-Klux Klan in this county. I'll break up every lodge in the next forty-eight hours. It's too easy for vicious men to abuse it. Its power is too great. Besides its work is done."

"I was just going to ask you to take that step, major. And now for God's sake get there in time to-night. I'd go with you, but my mare can't stand it."

"I'll be there on time, never fear," replied the major, springing on his horse, already saddled at the door.

That night when the crowd of young toughs assembled at their rendezvous it was barely 10 o'clock.

Suddenly a pistol shot rang from behind the schoolhouse, and before McLeod and his crowd knew what had happened fifty white horsemen wheeled into a circle about them. They were completely surprised and cowed.

Major Dameron rode up to McLeod.

"Young man, you are the prisoner of the chief of the Ku-Klux Klan of Campbell County. Lift your hand now and I'll hang you in five minutes. You have forfeited your life by disobedience to my orders. You go back to Hambright with me under guard. Whether I execute you depends on the outcome of the next two days' conferences with the chiefs of the township lodges."

The major wheeled his horse and rode home. The next day he ordered every one of the eleven township chiefs to report in person to him at different hours the same day. To each one his message was the same. He dissolved the order and issued a perpetual injunction against any division of the Klan ever going on another raid.

There were only a few who could see the wisdom of such hasty action. The success had been so marvelous, their power so absolute, it seemed a pity to throw it all away. Young Kline especially begged the major to postpone his action.

"It's impossible, Kline. The Klan has done its work. The carpet-baggers have fled. The State is redeemed from the infamies of a negro government, and we have a clean, economical administration, and we can keep it so as long as the white people are a unit without any secret societies."

"But, major, we may be needed again."

"I can't assume the responsibility any longer. The thing is getting beyond my control. The order is full of wild youngsters and revengeful men. They try to bring their grudges against neighbors into the order, and when I refuse to authorize a raid they take their disguises and go without authority. An archangel couldn't command such a force."

Within two weeks from the dissolution of the Klan by its chief every lodge had been reorganized. Some of the older men had dropped out, but more young men were initiated to take their places. Allan McLeod led in this work of prompt reorganization and was elected chief of the county by the younger element, which now had a large majority.

He at once served notice on Major Dameron, the former chief, that if he dared to interfere with his work even by opening his mouth in criticism, he would order a raid and thrash him.

When the major found this note under his door one morning he read and re-read it with increasing wrath. Springing on his horse he went in search of McLeod. He saw him leisurely crossing the street going from the hotel to the courthouse.

Throwing his horse's reins to a passing boy, he walked rapidly to him and, without a word, boxed his ears as a father would an impudent child. McLeod was so astonished he hesitated for a moment whether to strike or to run. He did neither, but blushed red and stammered:

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Read that letter, you young whelp!" The major thrust the letter into his hand.

"I know nothing of this."

"You're a liar. You are its author. No other fool in this county would have conceived it. Now, let me give you a little notice. I am prepared for you and your crowd. Call any time. I can whip a hundred puppies of your breed any time by myself with one hand tied behind me, and never get a scratch. Dare to lift your finger against me, or any of the men who refused to go with your new fool's movement, and I'll shoot you on sight as I would a mad dog." Before McLeod could reply the major turned on his heels and left him.

McLeod made no further attempt to molest the major, nor did he allow any raids bent on murder. The sudden authority placed in his hands in a measure sobered him. He inaugurated a series of petty devilries, whipping negroes and poor white men against whom some of his crowd had a grudge, and annoying school teachers of negro schools.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BIRTH OF A SCALAWAG.

The overwhelming defeat of their pets in the South and the toppling of their houses of paper built on negro supremacy brought to Congress a sense of guilt and shame that required action. Their own agents in the South were now in the penitentiary or in exile for well established felonies and the future looked dark.

They found the scapegoat in these fool later day Ku Klux marauders. Once more the public square at Hambright saw the bivouac of the regular troops of the United States army. The preacher saw the glint of their bayonets with a sense of relief.

With this army came a corps of skilled detectives, who set to work. All that was necessary was to arrest and threaten with summary death a coward, and they got all the information he could give. The jail was choked with prisoners and every day saw a squad depart for the stockade at Independence. Sam Worth gave information that led to the immediate arrest of Allan McLeod. He was the first man led into the jail.

The officers had a long conference with him that lasted four hours.

And then the bottom fell out. A wild stampede of young men for the West! Somebody who held the names of every man in the order had proved a traitor.

Every night from hundreds of humble homes might be heard the choking sobs of a mother saying good-by in the darkness to the last boy the war had left her old age. When the good-by was said and the father, waiting in the buggy at the gate, had called for haste and the boy was hurrying out with his gripsack there was a moan, the soft rush of a coarse homespun dress toward the gate and her arms were around his neck again.

"I can't let you go, child! Lord have mercy! He's the last!" And the low pitiful sobs!

"Come, come, now ma, we must get away from here before the officers are after him!"

"Just a minute!"

A kiss and then another long and lingering. A sigh, and then a smothered choking cry from a mother's broken heart and he was gone.

Thus Texas grew into the imperial commonwealth of the South.

* * * *

To save appearance McLeod was removed to Independence with the other prisoners and in a short time released, with a number of others against whom insignificant charges were lodged.

When he returned to Hambright the people looked at him with suspicion.

"How is it, young man," asked the preacher, "that you are at home so soon, while brave boys are serving terms in Northern prisons?"

"Had nothing against me," he replied.

"That's strange, when Sam Worth swore that you organized the raid to kill Rufe Lattimore."

"They didn't believe him."

"Well, I've an idea that you saved your hide by puking. I'm not sure yet, but information was given that only the man in command of the whole county could have possessed."

"There were half a dozen men who knew as much as I did. You mustn't think me capable of such a thing, Dr. Durham!" protested McLeod with heightened color.

"It's a nasty suspicion. I'd rather see a child of mine transformed into a cur dog, and killed for sheep stealing, than fall to the level of such a man. But only time will prove the issue."

"I've made up my mind to turn over a new leaf," said McLeod. "I'm sick of rowdyism. I'm going to be a law-abiding, loyal citizen."

"That's just what I'm afraid of!" exclaimed the preacher with a sneer, as he turned and left him.

And his fears were soon confirmed. Within a month the Independence Observer contained a dispatch from Washington announcing the appointment of Allan McLeod a Deputy United States Marshal for the District of Western North Carolina, together with the information that he had renounced his allegiance to his old disloyal associates, and had become an enthusiastic Republican; and that henceforth he would labor with might and main to establish peace and further the industrial progress of the South.

"I knew it. The dirty whelp!" cried the preacher, as he showed the paper to his wife.

"Now don't be too hard on the boy, Dr. Durham," urged his wife. "He may be sincere in his change of politics. You never did like him."

"Sincere! yes, as the devil is always sincere. He's dead in earnest now. He's found his level and his success is sure. Mark my words, the boy's a villain from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He has bartered his soul to save his skin, and the skin is all that is left."

"I'm sorry to think it. I couldn't help liking him."

"And that's the funniest freak I ever knew your fancy to take, my dear—I never could understand it."

When McLeod had established his office in Hambright he made special efforts to allay the suspicions against his name. His indignant denials of the report of his treachery convinced many that he had been wronged. Two men alone, maintained toward him an attitude of contempt, Major Dameron and the preacher.

He called on Mrs. Durham and with his smooth tongue convinced her that he had been foully slandered. She urged him to win the doctor. Accordingly he called to talk the question over with the preacher and ask him for a fair chance to build his character untarnished in the community.

The preacher heard him through patiently, but in silence. Allan was perspiring before he reached the end of his plausible explanation. It was a tougher task than he thought, this deliberate lying, under the gaze of those glowing black eyes that looked out from their shaggy brows and pierced through his inmost soul.

"You've got an oily tongue. It will carry you a long way in this world. I can't help admiring the skill with which you are fast learning to use it. You've fooled Mrs. Durham with it, but you can't fool me," said the preacher.

"Doctor, I solemnly swear to you I am not guilty."

"It's no use to add perjury to plain lying. I know you did it. I know it as well as if I were present in that jail and heard you basely betray the men, name by name, whom you had lured to their ruin."

"Doctor, I swear you are mistaken."

"Bah! Don't talk about it. You nauseate me!"

The preacher sprang to his feet, paced across the floor, sat down on the edge of his table and glared at McLeod for a moment. And then with his voice low and quivering with a storm of emotion he said:

"The curse of God upon you—the God of your fathers! Your fathers in the far-