

# THE NIGHT RIDERS

## MORE DESPERATE THAN THE "KU KLUX"

### AN INTIMATE STUDY OF THE "TOBACCO WAR" IN KENTUCKY AND TENNESSEE AND THE MYSTERIOUS CLAN WHICH WANTONLY BURNS AND KILLS IN ITS PROSECUTION

THE Night Riders of Kentucky and Tennessee is the name of a secret and desperate and daring clan that has struck awe to the hearts of the people of thirty counties in the fairest portion of the fair southland, furnished a thrilling topic of conversation for southerners everywhere and drawn the attention of the nation.

Existing, as it does, without the pale of the law, in open defiance of the commands of governors, the orders of judges, the warnings of newspapers, the admonition of the society to which its members are alleged to belong and the adverse public sentiment in the section where it flourishes, this clan has continued its depredations and work of destruction unharmed, undaunted and practically unmolested, coming whence no one knows, doing its work with martial precision and dispatch. It leaves no clue, open or veiled, for the most vigilant and valorous officers to find whither it went, when it will strike again or where.

Not since the days of the reconstruction period has such an organization existed, rivaling in every feature, often surpassing, the terrible work of the Ku Klux Klan, with its membership a hundred fold more desperate. An unexpected, mysterious, mythical force, it strikes swiftly under the cover of darkness and is away, leaving only the presence of a burned and charred ruin of once proud tobacco factories and warehouses to attest to its presence. Human life is not worth a feather's weight where reckless persons venture from their residences during a raid and refuse to immediately obey a command of unquestionable meaning to return.

#### Led by Shrewd Men

That this clan is under the direction of clever and shrewd men there can be no doubt to those who have watched its wake of destruction. Their every outbreak has been marked with military execution and planning; one after another appears a perfect replica of the preceding one. The night riders have been unusually active in the Kentucky portion of their domains of late.

That a compact to the death exists between its members there is every reason to believe. Men suspected of having more than a casual knowledge of the order summoned before courts have displayed a wonderfully elusive tact or a certain ignorance of the entire subject before them.

Deducting from the range covered, the membership must reach beyond the thousands.

The Night Riders, from the published and spoken accounts of their attacks, are not a rabid and bloodthirsty mob of maddened men seeking to wreak summary vengeance for some real or fancied wrong inflicted upon them. On the contrary, their work shows careful forethought, capable, destructive execution and miraculous daring.

Rider and horse are both uniformed and disguised, the former wearing in every instance so far reported a distinguishing white badge on his right breast in the shape of a triangle fashioned from some fabric. They are heavily armed in all instances, and from past work appear wholly capable and willing to use dexterously and with deadly precision their armament on man or beast that blocks their path.

The first indication of the existence of this order came to light in the fall of 1905, when negro tenants made complaint to their employers that masked and mounted men, numbering generally not more than 25, had visited them in their homes near midnight with a warning that their tobacco must be signed for in a pool of farmers being formed to hold the "weed" for better prices than they were then receiving. Needless to say, the negroes signed.

#### Warnings and Threats

Next came reports from farmers who were outside the pool that their tobacco plant beds had been scraped during the night with hoes or some similar instruments, and by parties leaving no trace of their presence other than the scraped beds. Switches, notes of warning, threats, shot were all at various times found attached to the doors and gates of farmers unfriendly to the pool. Minature mounds, representing graves, were found mysteriously thrown up in the yards of planters outside the society of growers holding their product for higher prices, the society in question declaring and proving it was not a party to the intimidation of those who declined to join it, commonly known in that section as "hill billies."

This was only the forerunner of an awful storm yet to break in its destructive fury. Following the scraping of plant beds came the news of one or two, and maybe more, wheat threshers being blown up with dynamite, the machines belonging to the "hill billies." Following closely on the heels of this, in the latter part of 1906, a large warehouse containing tobacco, belonging to the so-called tobacco "trust," was demolished at Fredonia, a little town in Kentucky. Dynamite was the agent used. Again at Eddyville, Ky., a simi-



AUGUSTUS E. WILLSON GOVERNOR OF KENTUCKY

lar warehouse belonging to the same interests was rendered into veritable kindling wood between the hours of sunset and dawn with a charge of dynamite skillfully placed.

Up to and including this last destruction of property the form of the destroyers was unknown, their movements being silent and unseen, until in the same year on the night of November 20 a body of approximately 200 masked and disguised men rode into Princeton, Ky., one of the strongholds of the trust, took possession of the place, drove the population of something near 3,000 back into their homes and laid in ruins three of the largest warehouses in the state filled to their capacity with tobacco belonging to the alleged monopoly, and escaped without a casualty so far as known. The fire marshal of Kentucky, Mott Ayres, a careful and conscientious official, hastened to the scene to investigate the outrage, but he was powerless to act. The evidence was insufficient.

From that time for quite a while peace and quietude ruled supreme in the tobacco district, farmers were receiving a good price for their crop and fears of another Night Rider outbreak were not entertained.

But the spirit of storm had not subsided, and the smoking embers of trouble were only resting to blaze anew with greater fury.

On the night of December 6, without warning, a band of dread Night Riders, in numbers of between 200 and 300, swooped down on the flourishing little city of Hopkinsville in Christian

county, Kentucky, captured the police department, took charge of the telephone office, stopped traffic on two great railway systems and applied the torch to three enormous warehouses filled with tobacco, among which was one belonging to John C. Latham, a New York banker and owner of the largest tobacco warehouse in western Kentucky. The invaders then completely riddled with bullets the offices of a newspaper belonging to the mayor of the town, who through his paper had condemned their acts of lawlessness. The loss in the raid was estimated at, in round numbers, \$200,000.

Close on the Hopkinsville invasion, and while the court was still investigating that depredation, the night riders made another sally, and on the night of January 2, about midnight, 300 of the marauders descended on Russellville, another Kentucky town, about 30 miles from Hopkinsville as the crow flies. Pursuing their regular methods, the riders completely surrounded the place, located guards at points of van-

age and proceeded to carry out their intention of destroying two large "trust" factories. The electric lights were turned off, the telephone offices, two in number, were seized, the raiders courteously and politely but firmly telling the young women in charge that no harm would come to them so long as they did not touch the switchboards. Members of the fire department were intercepted on their way to extinguish the burning warehouses ignited by the riders and turned back. People who left their residences to ascertain the cause of the excitement received orders to return. A passenger train about to enter the place was flagged just outside the city limits and its engine driver commanded to make no use of his whistle while passing through the town and no harm would come to him, his crew or passengers. The order was obeyed. No personal violence was offered the citizens who respected instructions to remain in their homes while the work of destruction was being carried on. Three buildings, adjacent to the warehouses were also consumed by flames, the entire loss totaling something over \$100,000 in buildings and tobacco.

After the work of destruction had been completed the riders met in one of the principal streets, counted their number, fired a parting volley into the air, and, as usual, vanished into the folds of the darkness of night.

Governor Augustus E. Willson, the new chief of the commonwealth of Kentucky, has not only offered large rewards for the apprehension of the riders, but a large bonus for information which will lead to the arrest of

ville on the morning following the attack is a pen picture of typical conditions prevailing immediately after a visit:

"RUSSELLVILLE, Ky., Jan. 2.— Everything is orderly and quiet in town after the ride of the raiders this morning, and every one is attending to his own business and helping repair as much as possible all the electric wires, as the town is in total darkness.

"The results show that the three men who were shot were not seriously injured, birdshot being used.

"Fire Marshal Mott Ayres arrived here this evening from Hopkinsville, but has made no statement yet.

"The young lady operators in both telephone offices state that men sent to guard the offices treated them with utmost respect and courtesy, but were firm in the refusal to allow them to touch the switchboards.

"The men who stepped out on their porches to see what was doing lost no time in obeying commands given by Night Riders, with leveled guns, to go back to bed.

"None of the riders was recognized, although they were well acquainted with the town, judging from the way they went about their work.

"The total loss of tobacco is about 51,000 pounds."

And thus does the last raid of the Night Riders, the Knights of the White Triangle of the Dark Tobacco District of Kentucky and Tennessee, the new Ku Klux Klan of the new south, pass into history, a blot on the names of two states and two peoples.

And now what is the cause of these night depredations, this destruction of property in communities otherwise peaceful? For all things, good or bad, have a cause, just or unjust.

I have endeavored to depict in a careful, accurate and truthful manner their existence, their work, their crime. To begin with, the Night Rider is not the first to ignore and trample under foot the supreme laws of two commonwealths and of a nation. Others preceded him and paved the way.

He is not the initial destroyer of property value, and while his means are more drastic, more swift, they are nevertheless none the surer. His is not the first act which laid in ruins the homes of the planters of the dark tobacco district, wrought havoc with fertile farms, drove fathers into despair and placed children and mothers in rags and tatters and want.

For that the Night Rider has been a wronged person as well as desperately wronging is conceded in the south. Desperation brought on this season of outrage which is blotting the fair name of his state.

In one of the fairest parts of Kentucky and Tennessee lies a strip of land, composed of 30 counties, known as the "Black Patch," or Dark Tobacco district, deriving its name from its

great fashion over the land, and the men who purchased this tobacco, for foreign export were not slow to catch the spirit. They forthwith organized a "trust" of their own. The Dark Tobacco district was divided into sections, with one agent to take the production of his district, without encroachment from his neighbor who had charge of affairs in an adjoining one. The price soon went down. What was the use of paying more when you could get it for less?

The farmer has no recourse; he might make his choice, to be sure, sell or hold, but the approaching maturity of a fertilizer mortgage usually influenced him very precipitately to choose the lesser of two evils—he sold, at an average of four cents a pound. It cost for actual production five cents, and brought, delivered in Europe, a net profit of never less than \$1.50 a pound! Quit raising tobacco he could not; the soil would not sustain anything else in sufficient quantities to sustain him. Leave the country he could not; railroads have a way of demanding cash for transportation of body and baggage. The latter he had in scant supply, the former was not included in his chattels.

#### Congress Too Busy

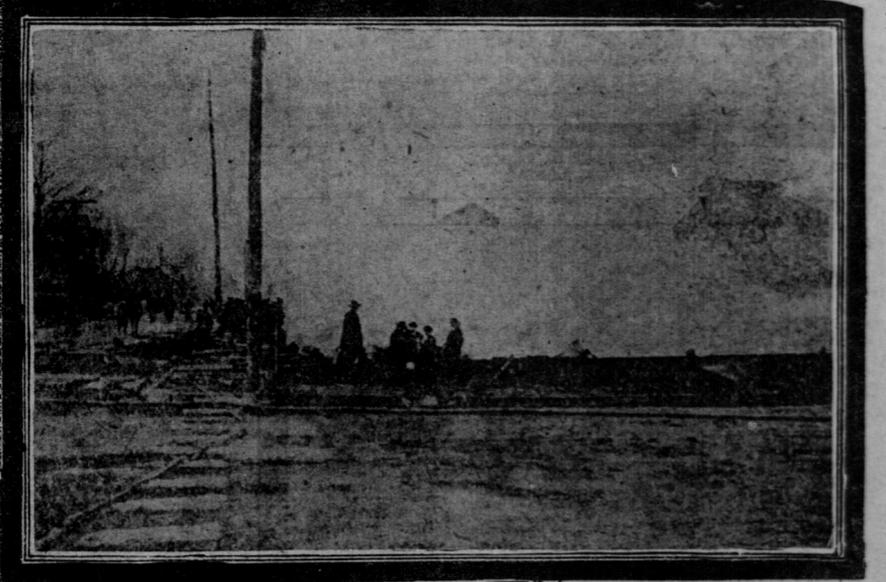
Things were becoming desperate in the extreme; something must be done. Congress was appealed to. It was busy.

The lane which has no turning is a long one. After ten years of oppression a body of men convened at the little town of Guthrie, near the Kentucky-Tennessee boundary line and in the former state, on September 24, in the year 1904. One thousand men present formed the Dark Tobacco Planters' Protective association and pledged themselves to hold their staple for living prices. The move was contagious, and other similar organizations sprang into existence, until their total membership controlled 90 per cent of all the tobacco raised. Fair prices were demanded and for a while apparently willingly given, but such a rich plum was not to be snatched by the action of a "handful of ignorant planters" without a stubborn fight. Prices which otherwise would have been considered enormous were offered to individual farmers, who had pledged themselves to sell as a body, in the endeavor to rend asunder the solid and determined phalanx of disgruntled planters. The offers were refused.

But the opposition was not to be overcome so easily. It meant to have that tobacco at any cost or know the reason why. This organization of farmers, which had sprung up overnight, with its numerous factories and warehouses, must be rent asunder.

A band of unknown miscreants visited negro planters of tobacco and threatened them. Disseminators of publicity lost no time in charging the visit to the Dark Tobacco association, which was denied and proved false. Next came scraping of plant beds. The association membership was charged with this, and in the disapproval it was brought to light that persons had ruined their own plants that outside sentiment might be thrown against the planters' association.

Then came the Night Riders of Kentucky and Tennessee. The federal investigation of a giant northern monopoly bears out partly the statements in this article.



RUINS OF WAREHOUSE BURNED BY NIGHT RIDERS AT HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY



RUINS OF M C TANDY COMPANY'S INDEPENDENT WAREHOUSE DESTROYED BY NIGHT RIDERS AT HOPKINSVILLE, KY.

#### Work for the Consuls

NUMEROUS letters are received by consular officers from persons seeking information about trade conditions, some of which relate to matters relatively small in importance, to secure which would involve an amount of labor and expense which it is impossible for consuls to expend. A request of this character was recently sent out to the principal consulates asking for information about laundries. The character and extent of information desired will be inferred from the reply made by Consul General William F. Wright of Munich which follows:

"I have your letter in which you request this consulate general to furnish you with the number of laundries in this consular district, whether power or hand laundries, and the details in relation to each separate plant, these details to include location, ownership, nationality of ownership, kind of power used; number, color and nationality of employes, wages paid, amount of business done per week and prices gotten. I also note your statement that any additional matter will be gladly received and that occasionally you get substance for a good story in these matters and sometimes photos for illustrating them.

The following dispatch from Russell-