

# **A History of the Reconstruction Era Ku Klux Klan**

taken from "Unionism And Reconstruction in Tennessee,  
1860 ~ 1869" by Dr. James Welch Patton.  
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It has been suggested that their plan was an imitation of the medieval German Vehmgericht as described in Goethe's Goetz von Berlichingen. This novel had been made available in the South through the medium of Sir Walter Scott's translation, and it was widely read along with Scott's Anne of Geierstein and other such romances, but there is no direct evidence that its plot was in the minds of the founders of the Ku Klux Klan. It is much more likely that the name of the Klan was derived by accident from a convenient Greek word and that its structure and organization were products of the same impulse that has led to the Alpha Sigma Sigma, the snipe hunt, and various other forms of hazing in small towns rather than an adaptation of the features of a medieval German tribunal.

The committee found it difficult to select a name which would be suggestive of the character and objects of the society, and they reported at the next meeting that they had been unable to make a selection. They did, however, mention several names which had been under discussion. Among these was the word "Kukloi" from the Greek word kuklos, meaning band or circle. At the mention of this word, someone is said to have shouted "Call it Ku Klux..... Klan" was added to complete the alliteration. The weird potency of the name Ku Klux had its influence upon the members, and the original plan was so modified as to make everything connected with the order harmonize with the name. The recommendations of the committee on rules and ritual were made to conform with the new idea, and the following officers were provided for, a Grand Cyclops, or president; a Grand Magi or vice-president; a Grand Turk, or marshal; a Grand Exchequer, or treasurer; and two Lictors, as outer and inner guards of the "Den" as the place of meei designated.

The one and only obligation exacted from the members was that they maintain a profound and absolute secrecy with reference to the order and everything pertaining to its existence. As a means to this end each member was required to provide himself with the following outfit, a white mask for the face, with orifices for the eyes and nose; a tall fantastic cardboard hat, so constructed as to increase the wearer's apparent height; and a gown or robe of sufficient length to cover the entire person. No particular color or material were prescribed, these being left to the individual's own taste and fancy. Each selected what would be in his judgment the most grotesque and fantastic. Flashy patterns of "Dolly Varden" calicoes seem to have been used most frequently.

The events connected with the initiation of a new member were ridiculous and ludicrous to the extreme. After the candidate had answered a number of absurd questions to the satisfaction of those present and had assumed the obligation of secrecy, he was placed blindfolded before the "royal altar" and his head was adorned the "regal crown". The royal altar was a large mirror and the regal crown was a large hat bedecked with two enormous donkey ears. In this garb the candidate was placed before the mirror and directed to repeat a couplet. When this act was completed the bandages were removed from the eyes of the initiate, and he was greeted with an outburst of boisterous laughter from those surrounding him. This usually completed the initiation. It so happened that both the name and the ritual which were selected were readily adaptable to the accomplishment of the plan which the order chose.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE KU KLUX KLAN

IN THE preceding chapters attention has been called to the presence of a secret and mysterious order, in Tennessee, known as the Ku Klux Klan. The activities of this organization constitute an important phase of the Reconstruction period in every Southern state, but they are doubly significant in Tennessee, as that commonwealth was the place of their origin. According to William Garrett Brown, a prominent authority on the place of the South in American History, "the Ku Klux movement was an outgrowth of the conditions that prevailed in the Southern states after the war. It was too widespread, too spontaneous, too clearly a popular

movement, to be attributed to any one man or any conspiracy of a few men. Had it existed only in one corner of the South, or drawn its members from a small and sharply defined class, some such explanation might serve. But we know enough of its extent, its composition, and the various forms that it took, to feel sure that it was neither an accident or a mere scheme. It was no man's contrivance, but an historical development. As such it must be studied against its proper background of a disordered society and a bewildered people."

The foregoing statement might well be applied to the situation in Tennessee. The Ku Klux Klan originated in that state as a harmless social organization, but in response to the exigencies of the local situation it quickly transformed itself into a political order which, in the extent of its operations and the force of its activity, might be compared with the Tugendbund or the Carbonari of continental Europe.

Only a brief space is necessary for relating the details connected with the origin of the Ku Klux Klan. In Pulaski, a typical Tennessee small town, there were in 1866 many young men who found time hanging heavily upon their hands. The reaction which followed upon the cessation of the excitement of army scenes and service was intense, and there was nothing to relieve it. They could not engage at once in business or professional pursuits. In the majority of cases, perhaps, business habits were demoralized, and there was no capital that could be diverted to mercantile or agricultural enterprises. There was accompanying this condition a total lack of the amusements and social diversions which prevail where, society functions in a normal manner. To relieve the ennui that was occasioned by this irksome existence, it occurred to six of these young men to organize a club or society of some sort. Thus, by accident as it were, John B. Kennedy, J. R. Crow, Frank O. McCord, Richard B. Reed, John C. Lester, and Calvin Jones brought into existence one of the most picturesque and powerful movements in all American history.

The first meeting of the projected club was held in the law office of Judge Thomas M. Jones, the father of one of the members, in May 1866. At this time a temporary organization was effected by the selection of a chairman and a secretary. Two committees were appointed, one to select a name for the new society and the other to prepare a set of rules for its government and a ritual for the initiation of new members. The club then adjourned to meet again in the following week for the purpose of hearing and acting upon the reports of these two committees. It so happened, in the meantime, that one of the leading spirits in the proposed order was invited to occupy a large residence situated on the outskirts of Pulaski during the temporary absence of its owner on a business trip to Mississippi. This young man invited his comrades to join him there, and, without the knowledge or consent of the owner, the place of meeting was changed from the law office to the residence.

Much speculation has been indulged in with regard to the source from which these young men drew the idea for their adopted - that of inspiring fear in the hearts of the superstitious Negroes and of suppressing the carpet-bagger instigators that were at work among the blacks. The majority report of the congressional investigating committee, as well as the accounts of some of the United States military officers, would suggest that the Ku Klux Klan was designed as a conspiracy against the Federal government and that it was, from the beginning, a lawless order. It is difficult to see how this could be true, for the people of Pulaski were not noted for their lawless or belligerent character, and moreover the constitution of the order was definite and specific in its declaration of allegiance to the United States government. In reality this Ku Klux Klan, in its original form, was nothing more than an organization born of the same impulse and conditions that have led to the snipe hunt and other hazing devices in the Southern country towns, and it was probably as harmless a piece of fooling as any to be found inside or outside of colleges past or present.

Had it not been for the abnormal and disordered condition of affairs in Tennessee at the time and the peculiar fitness of a secret organization of this type for a prominent place in those distressing times, the Klan would doubtless have had nothing more than a mere local and ephemeral existence such as was contemplated for it by its originators. As it was, however, it became, in response to the peculiar civil, social, and political conditions that prevailed in the South, a powerful order, and it was "as much a product of these conditions as malaria is of a swamp and sun heat." According to Frank Tannenbaum, who certainly cannot be numbered among the friends of the Ku Klux Klan,

"It became a reflex of the vindictiveness of Northern politicians and of the unscrupulous carpet baggers who swooped down upon the South as a vulture upon a wounded and stricken victim. It was a desperate act of self assertion and self defense. It was an attempt to rescue for the South the remnants of a civilization that was being subverted by coarser hands and without regard for the feelings of an outraged and unhappy community.... It drove the carpet bagger across the Mason and Dixon's line and uprooted his evil influence."

The origin of the Ku Klux Klan is relatively unimportant when compared with its transformation from a social order into a political organization. This transformation occurred, for the most part, in 1867. Conditions in Tennessee were at this time exceedingly propitious for the organization of a militant order of this nature. [Governor William G. "Parson"] Brownlow was constantly hurling imprecations of the most intense nature against the "rebels." He and his legislature had succeeded effectively in excluding this class from the ballot-box, and now they were conferring the suffrage upon the Negroes.

The events connected with the gubernatorial contest in 1867 contributed still further to the dissatisfaction and humiliation of the former Confederates. Although it was a foregone conclusion that they would not be allowed to vote, this class supported the Conservative candidate, Emerson Etheridge, who was favorable to their interest and who advocated the repeal of the franchise acts. In the old practice of "stumping the state," Etheridge, an able and fluent orator, would have been more than a match for Brownlow, who was at this time suffering from both pleurisy and palsy. The Governor, however, induced the legislature to pass a militia act, authorizing him to organize, equip, and call into service a volunteer force composed of one or more regiments from each congressional district. He was made commander-in-chief and was authorized to call out this force "whenever in his opinion the safety of life, liberty, property, or the faithful execution of the laws required it." When the campaign began Brownlow issued an order calling for the enlistment of troops to serve for a period of three years unless sooner discharged. The chief duties of these troops, many of whom were Negroes," would be to appear at the various places of public speaking under the pretense of protecting the state government against "rebel assaults." In a proclamation the Governor declared, "I do not consider it the duty of the state guards to stand quietly by and hear men excite the mob spirit by denouncing the Federal and state government, counselling resistance to the courts and setting aside their decisions." This allusion to the decisions of the courts had reference to the recent case of *Ridley v. Sherbrook*, where the elective franchise act had been upheld, the court declaring that improper registration or voting would be "resistance to the courts and setting aside their decisions." After this proclamation Brownlow remained quietly at home, leaving Etheridge to conduct his campaign as best he could.

Every possible obstacle was placed in the way of the Conservative candidate. When he spoke at Franklin, Sumner's company of Negro militia stood threateningly by. At Greeneville he was forced to defend himself against Horace Maynard with his umbrella. At Rogersville there was a bloody riot when it was announced that he would speak, resulting in a battle lasting twenty minutes, two persons killed, and seven mortally wounded. During his speech at Elizabethton a pistol was drawn, cocked, and pointed at him, while Horace Maynard went to the Methodist Church and spoke to "nearly all the darkies and leaguers." The election which followed was described by the Conservative press as a "hideous farce." There was a regiment of troops at the polling place at Memphis. At Knoxville the Negroes "received all the consideration." At Gallatin Conservative tickets were torn from the hands of the voters. At Fayetteville certificates of registration were issued by John Cary to Negroes under twenty-one years of age, and at the polls two hundred Negroes had guns. Needless to say, Brownlow was elected by a large majority.

The violent abuse and incrimination that was heaped upon the defeated candidate by the Radical press contributed to increase the anger of the former Confederates. The Press and Times was especially ribald in gloating over the defeat of the Conservatives, stating that "Etheridge is at his home in Dresden, surrounded by a lot of drunken rebels, and cursing Brownlow with awful volubility from sunrise to Sunset." and that "Etheridge pours forth such a pile of terrific oaths daily over his unexpected defeat that the old women of Dresden gather them up in baskets and use them for kindling. They burn like sulphur matches.

The Conservatives were naturally indignant over the defeat of their candidate, but their indignation was increased by the knowledge that this result had been accomplished by the aid of Radical speakers "imported" from the North. A correspondent in Coffee county wrote to the Press and Times in January that "so sure as there is a God in Heaven, if the radicals inundate the state with Northern speakers this year, the conservatives will do the same, and just as sure as this is done, so surely and certainly it will end in blood." In February the Boliver Bulletin, a Conservative paper, stated,

"The foul mouth radicals of this woe-befallen state are going to have a powerful time this coming summer. In order to win advocates to their lawless clan, they are going to import a dozen or more of the spoon-lifting, eel-skinning fraternity of the North and have them stump every county of the state. Among them

will be Fred Douglass, the negro orator. Nigger Douglass and Beast Butler to stump Tennessee. Good Lord, deliver us." This prediction was not wholly fulfilled, as Douglass and Butler did not stump the state, but much valuable assistance did come to the Radicals from Northern organizers of the so-called Union Leagues.

The Union League was an organization sponsored among the freedmen by the Northern Radicals. Its ostensible purpose was to inculcate the principles of loyalty and good citizenship among the Negroes, but its real purpose was to secure the votes of this class for the Radical Republican party. It is said to have been composed of the most disorderly element of the Negro population, led and controlled by white men of the basest and meanest type. They met frequently, went armed to the teeth, and uttered, and in many cases executed, the most violent threats against the persons, families, and property of men who had served in the Confederate army. The league made its appearance in the state soon after peace was declared in 1865, but with the admission of the Negroes to the ballot box it began to increase both in numbers and influence. In April, 1867, it had six councils in Weakley County alone, and it was reported to exist in "nearly every county in East Tennessee."

Such were the conditions that existed in Tennessee in the spring and summer of 1867. The former Confederates were disfranchised, while the votes of the Negroes were freely received at the ballot box. The militia act had provided for a "trainband, booted and spurred, to ride down the last vestige of the liberty left to the people of the state." The Union Leagues were encouraging the Negroes in acts of discourtesy and even deeds of violence against the whites. General Forrest was receiving as "many as fifty letters a day" from old soldiers and friends who were suffering under the disordered conditions, whose friends and relatives were being murdered, whose wives and daughters were being assaulted, whose barns, gins, mills, dwellings, and other property were being destroyed by the prowling marauders. The situation in which the former Confederates were placed was virtually unbearable. "The state was in the iron grasp of the Brownlow regime." The Governor professed to fear an uprising, and one might have occurred if the solution of the difficulty had not appeared from an unexpected source—the Ku Klux Klan, for it was at this time and in response to these conditions that this body was transformed into a militant organization whose purpose was to restore the state government to the white democracy.

The Ku Klux Klan had experienced a rapid growth during the first few months following its organization at Pulaski. Rash, imprudent, and bad men, however, had wormed themselves into the order, and the ties that bound the local dens together were entirely too weak for the work that was now contemplated. It became necessary, therefore, to effect a complete reorganization on a basis corresponding to the existing size and purpose of the Klan; to bind the isolated dens together; to secure unity of purpose and concert of action; to hedge the members by such limitations and regulations as were necessary to restrain them within proper limits; to distribute power among prudent men in the local dens and exact from them a close supervision of those under their charge. With this purpose in view, the Grand Cyclops of the Pulaski den sent messages to all dens of whose existence he had knowledge, requesting them to choose delegates to meet in a convention at Nashville in the early summer of 1867. This convention assembled at the Maxwell House early in April. So great was the secrecy surrounding its meeting that, in spite of the presence of Federal troops in the city, and of Federal officers in the hotel itself, the delegates were able to assemble, adopt a plan of organization, select and administer an oath to a leader, adjourn, and leave the city without attracting the attention of the authorities.

At this meeting a complete reorganization of the Ku Klux Klan was effected. Few changes were made in the administration of the local units or Dens, but they were bound together in a more formidable hierarchy. The territory represented at the convention, which included the greater portion of the late Confederacy, was designated as The Invisible Empire. This region was under the jurisdiction of a Grand Wizard and ten Genii. The Empire was subdivided into Realms, coterminous with the several states, each ruled by a Grand Dragon and eight Hydras. The Realms were divided into Dominions, corresponding to the congressional districts, and each governed by a Grand Titan and six Furies. The Dominions were divided into Provinces, coinciding with counties, each ruled by a Grand Giant and four Goblins. As formerly the local units were known as Dens. The officers of the Den included a Grand Cyclops and two Night Hawks, a Grand Magi, a Grand Monk, a Grand Exchequer, a Grand Turk, a Grand Scribe, a Grand Sentinel, and a Grand Ensign. The members of the body politic were designated and known as Ghouls. The Genii, Hydras, Goblins, Furies, and Night Hawks were staff officers, and the gradation and distribution of authority was perfect.

Except in the case of the Grand Wizard the duties and functions of each official were rigidly and minutely specified. The duty of the Grand Magi was to preside at all meetings of the Den during the temporary absence of the Grand Cyclops. The Grand Monk presided in the absence of both of these officials. The Grand Exchequer had charge of the revenue of the Den. It was the duty of the Grand Turk to notify all Ghouls of meetings of the Den. The Grand Scribe had charge of the correspondence, the Grand Sentinel was the doorkeeper, and the Grand Ensign was charged with the duty of preserving and protecting the Grand Banner. The tribunal of justice consisted of a Grand Council of Yahoos, for the trial of elective officers, and a Grand Council of Centaurs, for the trial of Ghouls and non-elective officers. General Nathan Bedford Forrest was chosen as Grand Wizard.

[A footnote to the last sentence above: The reasons for the selection of General Forrest for this position are not known. Susan Lawrence Davis, in her untrustworthy *Authentic History of the Ku, Klux Klan, 1865-1877*, p. 81, says that the selection was made at the suggestion of Captain William Richardson and with the approval of General Lee. In view of Lee's well known abhorrence of anything resembling guerrilla warfare, this Element does not seem tenable. Lester and Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.]

A constitution or prescript was adopted at the Nashville convention in 1867. This was the so-called original prescript. Where and how it was printed, and by whom it was written, no one now knows. A copy was sent, without notice or explanation, from Memphis to the Grand Cyclops of each Den. It must have been printed in a small printing office, for in the last pages the supply of asterisks ran out and other characters were adopted. Only one copy of the original prescript is known to be in existence. It is in the possession of Dr. Walter L. Fleming, to whom it was given by Ryland Randolph of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, who was the Grand Giant of one of the Provinces.

In some respects the original prescript was found to be defective, and in 1868 the "Revised and Amended Prescript" was adopted. Thomas Dixon says that this later prescript was written by General George W. Gordon, but he gives no authority for this assertion, which, in the absence of documentary evidence, is quite worthless. The copies of this prescript were printed secretly in the office of the Pulaski Citizen by Laps D. McCord and L. W. McCord, sons of the proprietor of the office. The manuscript was delivered to these boys by unseen persons, and to these persons the printed copies were returned for circulation. When the order was disbanded in 1869, strict directions were given that all documents pertaining to its existence should be destroyed, and only three copies of the "Revised and Amended Prescript" are known to have survived. One of these is in the library of Columbia University, one in the archives of the state of Tennessee, and one in the library of the University of North Carolina.

No material changes in the Klan's method of operation were made as a result of the reorganization. A few new features were added, and some of the old methods were slightly modified, but the essential features remained the same. The status of the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee, however, was completely transformed. It now began to appear in public and consequently brought itself within the cognizance of the Brownlow government. From this time on the history of the Invisible Empire in Tennessee becomes identified with that of the state government. A struggle ensued between the two, which in the end proved disastrous for the former.

It is impossible to estimate accurately the size of the Klan or the extent of its operations in the state. "It probably did not exceed the League in numbers," according to J. M. Beard, who estimated its membership in 1866 at one hundred thousand. This estimate, however, is so clearly a conjecture that it may be disregarded. A newspaper reporter stated that General Forrest placed the number of Ku Klux in Tennessee at forty thousand, but Forrest afterwards denied that he had made such a statement. A later estimate places the number at seventy-two thousand. None of these estimates are accurate or trustworthy. Such records as were kept were destroyed, and there were numerous Dens of which no records were kept and of which little was known. The number of Klansmen in the state will most likely remain a mystery.

It is no less difficult to determine the extent of the operations of the order. Judging from the accounts in the Radical Press and Times, it would appear that hundreds of armed and disguised men rode nightly in every county of the state. The Conservative papers were inclined to minimize the importance of these accounts. When it was suggested that the United States troops be called upon for assistance, the Union and Dispatch said,

"If the Klan in Tennessee be anything like the formidable and bloodthirsty combination that takes so much room in the Press and Times, the paltry force of regulars here would hardly be a match for the ghostly eavaliers, could they be found. The probability is that the whole thing will end in smoke and the "bullet read" never get beyond the sublime imagination of the Grand Cyclops, while the regulars will do their fighting in the shadows."

The Ku Klux Klan seems to have made its first public appearance in Tennessee on the night of July 4, 1867. An order had been issued by the Grand Dragon of the Realm of Tennessee to the Grand Giant of each Province in the state that a general parade be held in the capital town of the Province on this night. The parade at Pulaski has been described by those present.

"After nightfall they assembled at designated points near the four main roads leading into town. Here they donned their robes and disguises and put covers of gaudy material on their horses. A skyrocket sent up from some point in the town was the signal to mount and move. The different companies met and passed each other on the public square in perfect silence; the discipline appeared to be admirable. Not a word was spoken. Necessary orders were given by means of whistles. In single file, in deathlike stillness, with funeral slowness, they marched and countermarched throughout the town. This marching and countermarching was kept up for about two hours, and the Klan departed as noiselessly as they came."

At a tournament, at Columbia on November 10, "four of the mysterious order" appeared, "two of them attired in flowing robes of scarlet, the others in robes of deepest black, and all wearing ugly black masks. They bore a white flag with 'Ku Klux' printed upon it in consumptive looking black letters, alongside a cross of like color."

During the year 1868 the columns of the Press and Times teemed with editorials and news accounts describing the appearance and "outrages" of the "Ku Klux." In January a Union man and four Negroes were taken from a plantation near Lynnville, carried to the woods, and severely beaten. In the same month, a colored tanner, William Wesley, was taken from his home, near Lewisburg, beaten with pistols, and warned against exercising the elective franchise or attending conventions. At Dixon Springs a Republican candidate for sheriff was ordered to leave the town. In March it was reported that "there are in Rutherford County at least four hundred men, well organized, who are determined to drive every negro from the polls and force all Union men to leave the country." At Columbia a desperado, who had murdered a Conservative, was taken from the county jail and lynched by the Ku Klux. On March 5 one hundred Klansmen marched down Church Street in Nashville, "all mounted on caparisoned horses with their faces heavily masked, while some of them were fantastically rigged out with feathers after the style of a Comanche or Flathead Indian." At Carthage a school house was burned, and the teachers were notified "in a bloody handwriting, with a coffin at the head [of the paper], that they should suffer death unless they went North where they belonged."

On April 19 the Reverend L. Lincoln, a discharged Union soldier and a Baptist minister, was taken from the house of a friend in Marshall County, brutally murdered, and his body thrown into a sink hole. In July William Holley, a native Tennessean, teaching in a colored school in Hardeman County, received the following notice:

Hidden Recess  
Unterrified's Retreat  
Klan of Vengeance Eternity

William Holley:  
Villian away !!!

Ere another moon wanes, unless thou art gone from the place thy foul form desecrates, thy unhallowed soul will be revelling in the hell thy acts have made hot for thee. William, eat heartily and make glad thy vile carcass, for verily the "Pale Riders" will help in thy digestion. You and your friends will sleep an unwaking sleep if you do. Dare you eat?

The Sacred Serpent has hissed for the last time.

Beware !!!

K.K.K.

It is to be observed that the foregoing accounts were given by persons bitterly hostile to the Ku Klux Klan. In many cases the stories are interesting only as an indication of the capacity of these people for exaggeration and prevarication. On the whole, they are to be taken as evidence of a state of feeling that existed against the Klan in some quarters rather than as a correct and accurate account of its activity. The editorials of the Radical papers were scarcely less inflammatory than the news items. The Press and Times characterized "the kind of people who join the Ku Klux Klan" as young men, brought up in idleness, with no reflective powers and no purpose in life except drinking whiskey; plantation overseers, with no property, education, intellectuality, or humanity; and townsmen without work." With regard to the Klan, the same paper said that "the intelligent Christian people of Tennessee do not sympathize with the murderous ruffians whom we have described; nor do the honest soldiers of the rebellion who fought the battles of the rebel cause, participate in their nefarious and cowardly practices."

In an editorial entitled "Mosby, Old Saddles, and the Ku Klux Klan" the Knoxville Press and Messenger said, "Mosby has been buying old saddles in Washington. This means blood. Anarchy, treason, ruin, and every woe is to follow this apparently simple business transaction. The invincible Stanton, a prisoner in the war department, haunted by the ghosts of the brave soldiers, his insatiable ambition murdered, has become nervous and informed old Ben Wade, that "Mosby's Guerrillas" were to be seated in the same "old saddles" that their chief has purchased. Then the Ku Klux Klans are spreading all over the South. We are a done for people-the Ku Kluxes are upon us. We caution the inhabitants of the land of Lincoln and the people who feed on the savory cod, that they cannot resist Mosby, the Old Saddles, and the Ku Klux Klan."

The Knoxville Whig, speaking of those Ku Klux who had been sending threatening letters to the Governor, said in its characteristic manner, "We alike despise the threats and the threateners, and we say to them and to all who are backing them up, that if they want to bring on another war, to go ahead and do so. Johnson will not always be President, to protect and encourage them; but Grant or some other equally sound man will occupy the chair now dishonored by the accidental occupant, and mark what we say, if the Union army is ever compelled to come down here again to suppress another slaveholders' rebellion, they will make clean work of it."

The Nashville Banner was disposed to defend the Ku Klux Klan, but it was a voice crying in the wilderness: "In its birth and origin, the Ku Klux Klan is but the natural result of an utter disregard of law and order and of the peace of society on the part of those constituted to make the laws and execute them in the state. We hold to the opinion that the Ku Klux organization has much more to justify its action than the radical oligarchy (which is mainly responsible for it) has for the outrages it has committed against the people of Tennessee."

Whether these acts of violence were really committed, or, if they were, whether their perpetrators were real Klansmen or only imposters masquerading under their insignia, is of little consequence. It is sufficient that these exaggerated accounts came to the notice of the Governor. Already infuriated by the opposition that a certain element had offered to his regime, he immediately adopted measures to punish the enemies of his administration with great severity. His first attempt was unsuccessful, but others followed, resulting in the most stringent anti-Ku Klux act that the United States has ever witnessed.

The first attempt of the administration to deal with the problem presented by the Ku Klux Klan occurred on February 1, 1868, when the legislature passed an act providing that a sheriff, instead of being restricted to his own county in raising a force to put down an uprising, might "recruit said force by the employment of any loyal citizens in the state." This act was designed to secure the enforcement of the laws in counties where the population was "disloyal," but it failed in its purpose as the sheriffs were themselves frequently in connivance with, or under the intimidation of, the Klan. The indignation of the Governor at this check in his program is expressed in a private letter to a friend in Philadelphia, in which he said,

"We want another war to put down the rebellion. After that is fought, reconstruction will be easy in the Confederacy. We will only want a surveyor-general and a land office, with a deputy in each county, and a large amount of hanging."

In June, however, an event occurred which gave the administration an opportunity to adopt more severe measures. While S. M. Arnell, a member of Congress and the author of the unpopular elective franchise act, was visiting his home in Columbia the Ku Klux, with "pistols and rope in hand," made an unsuccessful attempt upon his life, and he appealed to the Governor for military aid. As the militia act had been allowed to expire earlier in the year, no state troops were available, and Brownlow appealed to General George H. Thomas, commander of the Department of the Cumberland, requesting a company of Federal troops to aid in the enforcement of the state laws. Thomas replied that "the state of Tennessee being in full exercise of all the civil functions of a state, the Military authority of the United States cannot legally interfere except in the aid and support of the civil authorities." He thus declined to send the troops and suggested that the Governor put in force the act for the protection of sheriffs passed in February. As this act could not be satisfactorily enforced, Brownlow was desperate. It was absolutely necessary that something should be done to repress the activity of the Ku Klux Klan, else this organization would succeed in frightening all Negroes from the polls in November and thus carry the state for Seymour and Blair. Such a result might alienate the support of the congressional Radicals and seriously impair the cordial relations of the state to the Federal government. Moreover, the discovery of a "Ku Klux Klan oath" by the metropolitan police of Memphis" [later proven to be a hoax] served to convince him that the order was contemplating mischief to the administration. He therefore called an extraordinary session of the legislature to meet on July 27, 1868.

In his opening message to the legislature, the Governor called especial attention to the Ku Klux situation: "This dangerous organization of ex-rebels now ramifies almost every part of the eleven states that once constituted the Southern confederacy and has already grown into a political engine of oppression so powerful and aggressive as to call forth an opposition, several notable military orders. Organized upon the same basis and having the same dark designs in view, that found a fit culmination in Booth's assassination of Abraham Lincoln, it works in secret, mid signs, symbols and pass words, hatching plots to scatter anarchy and permanent disorder wherever it may have an existence."

As a remedy for this situation, Brownlow requested that the legislature reenact the militia law of 1867. The action of the Governor was the subject of much criticism. The Union and Dispatch denounced the message as "the gauge of battle thrown to an exasperated people" and "a movement in the interest of the radical candidate for President." The Gallatin Examiner said, "We have but one reply to make to the atrocious message of Brownlow. If he wishes war, he will find our entire population ready for it. If peace, he can have it. The fearful responsibility rests upon him and his legislature. If war is the decision we can promise to make it short and sharp."

The legislature was soundly criticized by the Knoxville Press and Herald, "Their follies have ruined the state. They have brought its reputation so low that the once proud Tennessean blushes to tell where he hails from. The people of Tennessee, as all now see and feel, in their office holders and members of the legislature have been afflicted with plagues similar to those of the frogs and lice of Egypt, and they are panting to be delivered from their oppressors as did the Israelites of old."

So extensive and vigorous was this criticism that William B. Stokes felt called upon to reply to it. In a speech at the capitol he warned the people against resistance to the government of the state. In such an attempt, he said, they would be defeated just as they were in the Civil War. "You can never get control of this government by force. You cannot cut down the white and black loyalists without war, and you are not prepared for that." On July 28 "so much of the governor's message as referred to the calling out of the militia and to the suppression of the Ku Klux Klan" was referred to the committee on military affairs.

While this committee was making an extended investigation a number of events occurred, showing that the legislature was far from conciliatory. On August 1, B. F. Cheatham, Nathan Bedford Forrest, William B. Bate, John C. Brown, Joseph B. Palmer, William B. Quarrels, Thomas B. Smith, Bushrod R. Johnson, Gideon J. Pillow, S. R. Anderson, George W. Gordon, and George Maney, all prominent military officers of high rank in the late Confederacy, met at the capitol and issued a statement, denying that they were hostile to the state government, or that they entertained a desire for its overthrow by revolutionary or lawless methods. Moreover, they expressed a belief that there was no organization, public or secret, in the state with such a purpose, and they thought that the peace of the state did not demand military organization for its preservation. In a letter to a member of the state legislature, General Thomas expressed a feeling that this event afforded "some hope of a



peaceable and amicable adjustment of the difficulties now threatening the peace and welfare of the state."

The legislature was of a different mind, however, and when petitions began to be presented, asking for the repeal of the elective franchise acts, they were not favorably received. On August 4 the Governor submitted for the consideration of the legislature a letter from Judge John M. Lea. This letter called upon the Governor and the legislature to complete the reconstruction of the state by the adoption of an amendment to the constitution conferring the right of suffrage upon "every man, white or black, being a citizen of the United States and a citizen of the county wherein he may offer his vote, six months next preceding the day of election." Such a settlement, according to Judge Lea, would cause peace to reign throughout the state:

"Ku Klux organizations would be compelled to disband; Loyal Leagues would cease to exist; the people would look to the law for protection, and not count on any help from secret associations; and our Presidential canvass, conducted, it might be with warmth, would be the most quiet and peaceable that ever took place in the country."

The attitude of the legislature towards such a proposal is shown in the debate that followed the reading of this message. Such a decided opposition manifested itself towards entertaining any proposition to repeal the franchise acts that the whole matter was laid on the table .

In this action the legislature was encouraged and supported by the action of an extreme Radical convention which met in Nashville in August. This convention endorsed the course of the Governor in calling the extra session for the purpose of "protecting defenseless loyal men from the wanton violence of the Ku Klux banditti and others, aided and encouraged by wealthy rebels;" opposed the repeal of the elective franchise law; and called upon the legislature to pass an efficient militia law that would enable the Governor to meet any emergency. Similar resolutions were adopted by a Radical convention at Knoxville on August 26 .

On August 25, D. G. Thornburgh, chairman of the House committee on military affairs, reported a bill to organize and equip a state guard. The bill passed third reading in the House on August 26, and was transmitted immediately to the Senate. Meanwhile, however, the proposed law was denounced by petitions and editorials from all sections of the state. The Knoxville Press and Messenger declared,

"We need no militia. We need no soldiers of the regular army to keep the peace in this state. We are law abiding and intend to be. There is no use for any militia, even to bring to justice the two hundred and fifty thieves, murderers, and violators of female chastity that Brownlow has turned loose upon the country by his wholesome pardons."

The Governor, it was said, was intending to use the militia to aid in carrying the state for Grant in the forthcoming Presidential election. The Knoxville Press and Herald expressed the hope "to see the bloodthirstiness of Governor Brownlow checked at every point, and an era of reason and sobriety once more prevail in the government of the state." Even the Radical Press and Times was skeptical as to the propriety of passing such a severe law as the House committee had reported. It was feared that such procedure would necessitate the presence of Federal troops in the state to put down the terrific opposition that the law would engender and thus defeat the purpose of the law itself.

In the Senate, however, more moderate counsel prevailed, and the House bill was modified to some extent. As it was finally enacted the law authorized the Governor to organize, equip, and call into service a volunteer force to be known as "the Tennessee State Guards." He was also authorized to declare martial law in any county where, upon the evidence of the judge, attorney-general, senator, representative, and ten men of good character, it should appear that "the laws cannot be enforced, and the good citizens of the county or counties cannot be protected in their just rights on account of rebellion or insurrection, or the opposition of the people to the enforcement of the laws." In such counties the Governor was authorized to quarter troops and to assess and collect from those counties a sum sufficient for the payment and maintenance of the state guards so employed.

On September 2 the committee on military affairs submitted a lengthy report, embodying the results of its investigation of the Ku Klux Klan situation in the state. This report, containing thirty-eight printed pages, was a long catalog of outrages that purported to have been committed by members of the Klan. In the opinion of the committee conditions in the state were such as to demand a resort to severe measures. The report stated: "The committee, after summoning a great many witnesses before them, are satisfied that there exists an organization of armed men going abroad, disguised, robbing poor negroes of their firearms; taking them out of their homes at night, hanging, shooting, and whipping them in a most cruel manner, and driving them from their

homes. Nor is this confined to colored men alone; women and children have been subjected to the torture of the lash; and brutal assaults have been committed upon them by night prowlers, and in many instances the persons of females have been violated, and when the husband or father complained, he has been obliged to flee to save his own life."

Depredations were found to have been committed practically all over Middle and West Tennessee and in some parts of East Tennessee. Particularly was this true in the counties of Maury, Lincoln, Giles, Marshall, Obion, Hardeman, Fayette, and Gibson. As the greater portion of the testimony taken by this committee was given by agents of the freedmen's bureau, it is of little value as accurate evidence of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, but it served to convince the committee "that a resort to some measures that will correct evils of such enormity is an absolute necessity," and "that no further evidence is necessary to convince every thoughtful mind that more than ordinary means are requisite, under existing circumstances, to secure peace and protection to persons and property." The committee therefore recommended "that the governor should be invested with full powers to call out such military force as may be required to secure obedience to the laws" and "that ample means should be placed at his disposal to see that the laws are faithfully executed."

Acting upon this recommendation the legislature passed "an act to preserve the public peace," commonly known as the Ku Klux act. This was one of the most severe pieces of legislation ever inscribed upon an American statute book. It provided, "That, if any person or persons, shall unite with, associate with, promote or encourage, any secret organization of persons, that shall prowl through the country or towns of this state, by day or by night, disguised or otherwise, for the purpose of disturbing the peace, or alarming the peaceful citizens of any portion of this state, on conviction by any tribunal of the state, shall be fined five hundred dollars, imprisoned in the state penitentiary not less than five years, and shall be rendered infamous."

The same punishment was provided for any witness who should refuse to obey a summons, or who should appear and refuse to testify; for any prosecuting attorney who, "having been informed of a violation of the law should refuse to prosecute; for any officer, clerk, sheriff, or constable who should refuse to perform any of the duties imposed upon him by the act; for anyone who should write, publish, advise, entreat, publicly or privately, any class of persons to resist any of the laws of the state; for any person who should make threats with the intention of intimidating or preventing any elector or person from exercising the elective franchise; for anyone who should attempt to break up an election in the state; and for anyone who should feed, lodge, entertain, or conceal in the woods or elsewhere any person known to be a violator of the act. The law further provided that no prosecutor should be required on indictments and that no indictment should be held insufficient for want of form; that when any process should be returned unexecuted, for any cause whatever, to the court from which it was issued the clerk should issue an alias *caapias* to the said county; and that if the inhabitants of such county should permit such defendant to be or live in said county, they should be subject to an assessment of not less than five hundred or more than five thousand dollars, at the discretion of the court. All inhabitants of the state were authorized to arrest offenders under the act without a warrant. Every public officer, in addition to his regular oath, must swear that he had never been a member of the Ku Klux Klan. In addition to this, it was provided that damages might be assessed upon the following scale: for entering the house or residence of any officer at night, in a hostile manner or against his will, ten thousand dollars; for killing any peaceable individual in the night, twenty thousand dollars; and all other injuries to be assessed in proportion.

On September 16 the Governor, acting under the authority thus conferred, issued a proclamation against the Ku Klux Klan and called upon all good, loyal, and patriotic people, both white and black, to raise companies and report to him at Nashville. "I propose to meet them [the Ku Klux] with such numbers and in such a manner as the exigency shall demand, whatever may be the consequences. I will not be deterred from the discharge of my duty herein by threats of violence from rebel speakers or rebel newspapers, nor by any other means of intimidation." Notwithstanding the force of this proclamation, it did not meet with the desired response, and the Governor was forced to rely upon the assistance of Federal troops for a time.

On September 1 a legislative committee composed of William H. Wisener, Thomas A. Hamilton, and J. H. Agee, was sent to Washington to importune the President for aid. Johnson referred this matter to the secretary of war, General Schofield, who directed General George H. Thomas to send such forces into Tennessee as would be necessary "to execute the laws, preserve the peace, and protect the law abiding citizens of the state." General Thomas thereupon ordered a regiment of infantry to proceed to Tennessee where, upon the advice of the Governor, it was distributed over the counties where the Ku Klux were supposed to be the

most dangerous. The headquarters of the regiment with three companies were sent to Columbia, and one company each was sent to the county seat of Franklin, Bedford, Lincoln, Marshall, Wayne, Rutherford, and Giles counties respectively. This action contributed to the success of the Republican presidential ticket in the state.

The conditions in the state militia in 1867 had not been attractive, and for this reason there was no great desire on the part of able-bodied men to enlist in the state guards. An additional campaign was therefore necessary in order to induce enlistments. During the winter of 1868-9 the columns of the Press and Times were again filled with accounts of "Ku Klux outrages." In Giles County it was reported that Negroes had been driven away from their homes for voting for Grant. In Overton County Mike Strohmeir was notified to cease collecting revenue. In Bedford County Negroes were coistantly whipped, robbed, and threatened. In almost every county in Middle Tennessee it was "reported" that various and sundry "outrages" had been committed upon Negroes and Union men.

To meet this situation the Governor issued another proclamation, on January 20, 1869, calling upon "all good and loyal citizens to enter the ranks of the state guards, be mustered into service, and aid in suppressing lawlessness." This proclamation met with the desired response, and on January 25 Brigadier General Joseph A. Cooper was placed in command of all the state forces. On February 20 the Governor issued his last proclamation, stating that there were over sixteen hundred state guards in the city of Nashville. At the same time he proclaimed martial law over the counties of Overton, Jackson, Maury, Giles, Marshall, Lawrence, Gibson, Madison, and Haywood, and directed General Cooper "to distribute these troops at once and continue them in service until we have unmistakable evidence of the purpose of all parties to keep the peace."

General Cooper, thereupon, mobilized the state guards and prepared for an active campaign against the Klan. His precautions, however, were unnecessary for the Ku Klux Klan was a dying order in Tennessee. On February 20 Brownlow resigned his position as chief executive in order that he might take his seat in the United States Senate to which he had been elected by the preceding legislature. His successor, DeWitt Clinton Senter, almost immediately began to extend promises of conciliation to the Conservatives. The Brownlow regime was at an end. "Law and order meetings" began to spring up in the various counties, and, with its arch-enemy departed, the Ku Klux Klan gradually disappeared from the state."

At the same time the Invisible Empire ended its existence. In March, 1869, the Imperial Wizard issued a proclamation in which he recited the legislation that had been directed against the Klan, and stated that the organization had, in large measure, accomplished the objects for which it was brought into existence. In time of danger, he said, it had afforded protection and security to many people and in many ways it had contributed to the public welfare. But the members of the Klan had violated positive orders, and others, under the name and disguise of the organization, had assumed to do acts of violence for which the order had been held responsible. Therefore, he directed that the organization heretofore known as the Ku Klux Klan be dissolved and disbanded.

Thus lived, and so died this strange order. Its birth was an accident; its growth a comedy; its death a tragedy. It owed its existence wholly to the anomalous condition of society and civil affairs in the South during the years immediately succeeding the unfortunate contest in which so many brave in blue and gray fell, martyrs to their convictions.