

THE CRISIS

though as a matter of fact she lived for two weeks after and died of pneumonia rather than of her wounds.

The sheriff from Cumming brought in one particularly "sorry nigger" that public opinion adjudged guilty, together with several suspects. Those of the Brown's bridge neighborhood who escaped arrest began to find themselves in limp heaps of two or three along the roadside.

Cumming, the county seat, with its population of 300, is built around the four sides of Court House Square. On one corner are the bank and the hotel; diagonally opposite is the lock-up, a red brick, one-story box about thirty feet square. On Wednesday (October 17) the mob went to the house of the sheriff and demanded the keys. He told them they would have to find them, and they proceeded to search his house, without success. So they procured a sledge, led aside the deputy who was on duty in front of the jail, and smashed in the locks and the Negro's skull with a hammer. With a pair of new harness reins taken from the buggy of the rural mail carrier they dragged the Negro around Court House Square by the heels, and hanged him to the cross-arm of the telegraph pole in front of the bank. There was just a quiver of life in the body when they strung him up at three o'clock in the afternoon.

A colored teamster driving his mules around the corner into the square, seeing that symbol dangling in front of the most respectable institution in the county, quit his wagon and ran.

"Let's run 'em all out," the wielder of the hammer suggested.

By the time they cut the body down at sunset the exodus from Forsyth County had commenced.

"Those of us who should have known better," a well-to-do Cumming merchant told me, standing there in that peaceful backwoods market place, "looked on and said the niggers deserved to be killed. We didn't mean it, and we didn't foresee the consequences. But that low-down gang took it as literally as they do the advice of Tom Watson."

They started in to rid Forsyth County of the last one of those two thousand colored people. A Negro would receive an anonymous letter giving him twenty-four, thirty-six hours, occasionally ten days to

quit the county. That meant in some cases precipitate flight and the abandonment of everything owned in the world. In other cases it meant a sale at a few days' notice, at which a cow worth \$25 would bring \$8-9, and hogs worth \$15-20 sold for \$4-6. House and land brought nothing. If the Negro owned a mule he moved out his furniture, otherwise it was burned after his departure. Failure to vacate on the date set meant a stealthy visit in the night and either dynamite or the torch. The result was a state of terror which caused one Negro family to accept a twenty-four hour notice from two children aged five and six respectively who had learned the game from their elders. At the hotel in Cumming the owner kept one servant on until January after repeated notices, but let her go then for fear of inability longer to protect the servant's life. A genial, poverty-stricken white farmer named Bagwell described the final incident:

"Old man Roper yonder had a nigger he well nigh couldn't live without, knew every stone and stump on the farm. The boys warned him time and again to get shot of him, but Roper would keep him on. So one night they jest had to put a stick of dynamite under the nigger's house. Blew him clean through the roof. No, it didn't kill him, but it started him for Hall County right smart. . . I reckon they won't be back; you see the young fellers are growing up sort of with the idea that this is a white man's county."

The return to law and order in Forsyth County was celebrated by a triumph as impressive as the spectacle of the 17th October. Two Negroes who were in jail on that date as witnesses of the raping were taken to Atlanta by an escort of militia, returned to Cumming guarded by the troops, and were convicted on the testimony of the sister of one of the men who turned State's evidence and swore to holding a lantern while her brother ravished the Crow girl. (She was shot shortly after the trial.) A hundred and fifty militiamen were brought in for the hanging to see that the convicts arrived at the scaffold alive. In exchange for the lumber used to construct the blinds about the scaffold, a Cumming doctor offered the use of his pasture on the edge of the town for the execution. The night before, however, he was cheated of his reward by the gang which burned

THE CHEROKEE FIRES

down the blinds. The following day, by actual count, over 10,000 citizens of the State parked their Fords and tethered their mules in the doctor's pasture to witness the formal dedication of Forsyth County, Ga., to the white race.

The county to the north of Forsyth, Dawson, produces nothing in the northern parts but timber and "blockade" whisky. In the southeastern corner, however, along the Etowah River from Palmour to the county line, are exceedingly rich alluvial flats. The corn of this region requires field labor, and in this rich section had settled what Negroes there were in Dawson County, about a hundred all told. According to "Colonel" A. W. Vandiviere, a lawyer at the county seat who was for years the county school commissioner, there was a maximum of forty children enrolled at the colored school under one of the graduates of Morehouse College. Eighteen of the men were registered voters, and they paid taxes on about \$5,000 worth of property, most of the number being tenants. He says they were an unusually industrious, responsible group, none of whom had ever been accused of any such crime as that committed in Forsyth County.

Nevertheless, a gang of about a dozen crackers, with one John Jackson as the leading spirit (according to Col. Vandiviere) took advantage of the situation in the next county and began serving notice on the Negroes in Dawson. As they had nothing against them excepting their color and competition, however, they did give them generally two weeks in which to leave. As in Forsyth County, the night-riders were poverty-stricken, cowardly crackers who hoped by driving the Negroes out to be able to rent whatever land they desired, and to command their own price for labor. Not one in the gang, according to Robert A. Gober, paid over \$2 a year taxes.

This Robert Gober is the strong man of Dawson County. He is postmaster at Dougherty, the center of the Etowah Valley district, owns the only store and gristmill in the region, is a large landholder, and had over \$5,000 at stake in provisions advanced and money loaned to colored men on ungathered crops in the two counties when the trouble started. It should be stated equally distinctly that he is a big-boned, big-hearted mountaineer with a rudimentary sense of justice and five well edu-

cated sons to his credit. He is the one man in the two counties who had the courage to fight.

Mr. Gober told his colored tenants and laborers that he would protect them as long as they would stay. From Gainesville he sent one of the Hall County officials down to Atlanta to try and get help from the Federal Government.

"If we could have gotten a few detectives sent in here right at the start and obtained the evidence to convict one or two of them, the rest would have been frightened out," he believes.

Failing to get help from outside, he went to the life insurance agent, told the company exactly what he proposed to do, and persuaded them to take him as a special risk for five years. Night after night for months, while the colored women and children fled to the woods, afraid even to light a fire, he slept with loaded guns handy in the hope of detaining some tangible evidence when they came to blow up his tenants' houses or burn down his store.

A neighbor who followed his example in paying no heed to the warnings to "get shot of your niggers," heard a fusillade a hundred yards up the road one dark night, and then, as the Negroes fled, saw the flames licking up the sides of their quarters. The gang threw a couple of dogs and a shot into the flames to show their courage and disappeared into the dark. Mr. Gober was unable to keep any of his colored people after this incident except Homer Palmer.

"Homer was a nigger that was always ready to do anything I asked of him day or night," Mr. Gober says. "I would send him to the bank at Gainesville with \$500 just as quick as I would my son—he'd a fit for that money. When my son was dying of pneumonia, Homer jumped on a mule in the worst blizzard we ever had in these parts and rode twenty-five miles for the doctor and twenty-five miles back. We had to pry his fingers open to get the reins out of his hands when he rode into that yard in the middle of the night—clothes frozen stiff. That nigger saved my son's life, and I'd be fighting for him yet if he'd a stayed on."

Homer did stay until the March after the Forsyth lynching, through five months of terror. After the burning at the Roland