

While the K. C. ranch, on the North Fork of Powder River, was less than a score of miles from Tisdale's place on the Crazy Woman River. It was, as I have said, full daylight before the party arrived at the buildings.

Some three or four miles from the buildings the party had halted to await the arrival of Shonsy and his crew of spies. The spies, on their return, reported everything okay. The report given, the party resumed its journey. The rustlers were unsuspecting and would be easily surprised. Therefore, it was with lighter hearts that Canton and Smith ordered the party forward.

All this time, Charlie had been planning and scheming a way of escape, some manner in which to give them the slip. But no safe way appeared and he was with them when daylight came, so of course, was held again during the day. Had the chance afforded, he would have slipped away and have tried to rejoin me at Buffalo where I hoped to be, but evidently Canton and Smith were not entirely at ease, for never was he lost sight of. Always some of the Texans were with him, and in spite of his worries, Charlie was still with the bunch when daybreak showed the K. C. Ranch lying in view, plainly before them.

Along the stream, out of sight of the house, Canton, Smith, Tisdale and Shonsy held consultation. A covered wagon in the yard aroused the suspicions that strangers might be present. These strangers might well be friends of the cattlemen, and if so, must not be harmed. The gang was divided off, the buildings entirely surrounded and preparations made for an attack. Built where the stream made a bend, the invaders were able to slip, unseen (had the inmates been awake and watching) to strategical positions along the river bank, in the stables and in a gulch south of the buildings. No one was more than a hundred and fifty yards away from the house where the rustlers were.

It was now too light to follow out the original plans and dynamite the buildings. Also, the fact that strangers were present, complicated matters. Tisdale would not stand for injuring them, so the dynamite, several pounds, carried by Joe Elitt, was placed aside and plans made for a regular old-fashioned attack of the buildings.

A little after daylight a man with a bucket in his hand came from the cabin and walked down to the river for water. When he appeared, Tisdale, from his place of concealment, pronounced him a stranger. When he stooped to fill his pail, he was captured and held captive below the river bank, which here, was several feet high and out of sight of the house. This captive was the elder of the trappers. His name was Jones.

A little later, a younger man, came out of the house and stood looking about him. This was, Tisdale also decided, a stranger. After a time he headed for the barn, evidently with the intention of feeding his horses. Captured and held, he was found to be the younger of the trappers. His name was Walker. From him, it was learned that but two men were in the house and that these two were Nate Champion and Nick Ray. These two captives were the two witnesses Witte and Harvey kidnapped some days later, badly treated, and, eventually, on the trumped-up charge of selling whiskey to the Indians, they were disposed of by being taken east and sent out of the country.

Before long, another man, heavily bearded, came from the house, looked about him, put up his arms to stretch, and then picking up an ax, began cutting wood in preparation for a fire and breakfast. Tisdale, looking at him, said, "We don't want him!" But some of the others, probably the hired Texan killers, thought otherwise. It was \$50 per man. Already two had been allowed to escape. If this were to keep up, where was the blood money to come in? The money was in sight and easily earned. The victim was unarmed and off his guard. From the barn where Smith's Texans were stationed, came a shot. It was rapidly followed by others from the

barn, river bank and gulch. Rifles cracked and lead streaked toward the doomed and unarmed victim. The start was made from the barn, followed by those concealed along the river bank and last, by the six concealed marksmen in the gulch. All these added to the uproar. The bearded man fell, badly wounded, but started, and continued to crawl toward the door of the cabin.

Charlie had been sent with a bunch of men and was concealed with them below the river bank. He did not see the first shots fired, as he was lying down beside the river, drinking. Jumping to his feet and looking through a screen of bushes, he saw the wounded man. Almost as he glimpsed him, the doorway was darkened and gallant Nate Champion, Winchester in hand, appeared in the opening.

Throwing his rifle to his shoulder, he fired shot after shot into the ranks of the invaders. Then, his gun empty, he stepped back within the cabin and quickly reloaded it. From now on the shooting was continuous. Champion kept the gang busy firing at him in order to let his wounded comrade draw nearer the open doorway. At last, with Ray merely a few feet away, Champion sprang through the door to the outside. Completely exposed to the fire of some two score marksmen, he emptied his rifle into their midst. Then, tossing the gun through the open doorway, he picked up Ray and disappeared within, bearing with him the form of his wounded companion.

"By God," said the Texas Kid, who boasted uncontradicted, that he had fired the shot that brought Ray down, "that man may be a rustler, but he is also a HE MAN with plenty of guts!"

This was the thought of all. While out after blood, every man in the barn as well as along the stream expressed admiration for the heroic act. Yet, not a man of them but was ready to go on with the hellish job. They were out for "Blood money" and like their prototypes, the frontiersmen of the eerie day thought, "a scalp was a scalp no matter from whose head it came."*

Scarcely had Champion disappeared within the cabin, when again, from door and window, his Winchester broke forth in defiance of his foes.

All forenoon and until midafternoon, the conflict raged; one man against almost half a hundred. Surrounded by blood thirsty fiends, Charley was compelled to take part in the assault. Repeatedly, he fired his rifle, but always above the roof or into the ground below the cabin.

All the rest of the forenoon and until about 3:00 p. m., Champion held the crowd at bay. Several of the invaders were wounded, but none seriously injured, slight flesh wounds, alone, being received. All this time they were firing at the flash and smoke of Champion's shots, at doors, windows, and at the chinking in the log walls. How Champion escaped death or serious injury, a seeming miracle, no one can tell. He may have been injured, but if he were, he still answered shot for shot and curse for curse.

About midafternoon, a team of horses pulling the running gears of a wagon upon which sat a young lad of twelve to fifteen years, came in view. Some forty to fifty feet behind it, rode a man on horseback. This man was recognized as Jack Flagg, editor of the "Buffalo Voice" and by the cattlemen, one of the most hated of Johnson County's citizens.

They were ordered to stop and throw up their hands, but they did neither. The boy yelled at his team and the man spurring his mount, rode along side the horses. With his quirt vigorously applied, he forced them into a dead run, meanwhile riding beside them and holding them in place by means of quirt and voice.

Flagg and his step-son were within seventy-five to one hundred yards of the stables when the mob opened fire on them. Here the road passes this close to the K. C., house and buildings. The shots missed the man and boy and the sounds of the gunfire and whistling bullets further alarmed the fleeing horses. At a dead run they rushed on, thundering across the bridge. The running gears of the three and a quarter inch wagon were thumping and banging at their heels, and with Flagg

himself, the incarnation of fury, cursing and quirting them at every jump.

Of the score of men behind the stables, all were shooting, and now, several, some half dozen or more, mounted their horses, concealed near at hand, and started in pursuit, firing as fast as they could pump in shells and pull the trigger. Shooting as they were from the back of running horses, no damage was done.

After going about a mile, Flagg had the boy stop the team and cut loose one of the horses. This the lad did, mounting it in haste. First, however, he handed Flagg his trusty Winchester from the wagon hounds where it was secured. The sight of the gun worked wonders. Although, fully three hundred and fifty yards away, the pursuers halted. It was one thing to chase, unopposed, fleeing and supposedly unarmed men, but when the redoubtable Jack Flagg halted and raised to his shoulder his faithful 45-90, discretion became the better part of valor, so they scattered. Had Flagg possessed plenty of ammunition, some one would have paid the extreme penalty, but unfortunately, as he afterwards related, Flagg had but three shells in his gun so did not dare fire, reserving these shells for surer work should they attempt to close in on him.

Flagg's escape complicated matters. He would, they believed, hasten as fast as his horse would carry him, to Buffalo and there inform Sheriff Angus of the happening. As it was, Flagg went in a different direction but with equally disastrous results.

The wagon left by Flagg and stepson was trailed, by means of ropes and saddle horses to the barn, and here it was prepared for its fell purpose. Poles and boards were fastened to it and on these were piled hay and pitch pine knots. Then, guarding themselves, while others, from the other side held Champion's attention by pouring in volley after volley from ambush, it was backed against the west side of the building, a match struck and fire set to the inflammable materials piled thereon. This done, they rapidly retreated, leaving the fire to do its work.

This job, the only brave piece of work done during the whole cowardly assault, was performed in person, by Major Wolcott, A. B. Clark, John Tisdale, Tom Smith and James Dudley. Charlie names these men, and these names are given in Dunning's confession.

This confession is remarkably accurate in all the points that came to my personal knowledge and observation. Of course, Dunning could not see all and much of what he confesses was merely hearsay. Still these names are those of the men taking part in this heroic job, for heroic it was even if performed by cowardly assassins. While others assisted them, Solon always held these men entitled to the honor.

Soon the cabin was a mass of flames. Still no one appeared for a time. All stood and looked on in wonder. Surely the inmates must be dead! Surely no mortal man could remain thus long, in that fiery inferno!

Suddenly the door, at the south end of the house, was thrown open and the figure of a man appeared therein. He was in his sock feet, bare-headed, coatless, Winchester in hand and Colt at belt. Shots by the dozen were fired at him, but seemingly, he bore a charmed life, for on he ran, covering the ground with almost the speed of a greyhound, or a startled and alarmed antelope or jack rabbit. Some two hundred yards had he covered in this manner and was, seemingly, nearing the open when he came opposite the gulley wherein lay the picked shots of the outfit awaiting for just this opportunity. These were, according to Dunning, and Charlie's okay of the statement, Mike Shonsy, Jack Jones, Elick Kinzie and the three Bokar brothers who raised to their feet and at short range poured in their deadly volley. An instant Champion paused and attempted to bring his rifle to his shoulder. Too late. A second volley rang out and gallant Champion, death stricken, fell to the earth. A brave man, ambushed, burned out and butchered by a gang of cowardly assassins.

Either Champion had been many times wounded during the day or else his slayers,

too cowardly to approach until absolutely assured of his death, kept firing into his body for it was found, later, completely bullet ridden. There were no fewer than eight and twenty balls having pierced his frame.

Sam Clover, the Herald correspondent says, "Champion ran into the midst of the best shots in the command," that he "saw and overshot his mark" and "a bullet striking his right arm, knocked his rifle therefrom" and that "before he could draw his revolver" he was "shot in the breast and killed."

Clover continues, "Nate Champion, the King of Cattle Thieves and the bravest man in Johnson County, was dead. Prone upon his back, with his teeth clenched and a look of mingled defiance and determination upon his face to the last. The intrepid rustler met his fate without a groan and paid the penalties of his crimes with his life. A card bearing the significant legend, 'CATTLE THIEVES BEWARE!' was pinned to his blood-soaked vest, and there, in the dawn, with his red sash tied about him and his half-closed eyes raised toward the blue sky, this brave, but misguided man was left to lie by the band of regulators. Having succeeded in their object, the band rapidly withdrew from the scene of the double tragedy."*

Champion's Winchester and his deadly six-shooter were taken by members of the invading party. His memorandum book, blood-soaked and with a bullet hole through it, was glanced at and even these hardened spirits openly commented on the bravery and hardihood of the man who could, in his situation, a dead comrade beside him and his mortal foes firing from all quarters, write down, as Champion had done, all the day's happenings. Beyond scratching out names, where written, the memorandum was unmolested and was found, later, by friends when preparing the body for burial.

Following, we give what Champion wrote with his dead comrade beside him and with the balls from forty or more Winchesters constantly crashing into the logs, or penetrating doors and windows. It is under the printed date of April 9, 1892. It was written with a lead pencil and is, as published in the papers, copied off for friends and comrades. It is also, as set down in Mercer's BANDITTI OF THE PLAINS.

It reads as follows:

"Me and Nick was getting breakfast when the attack took place. Two men here with us, Bill Jones and another man. The old man went out after water but did not come back. Nick started out but I told him to look out as I thought there was some one at the stable and would not let them come back. Nick is shot but not dead yet. He is awful sick. I must go and wait on him. It is now about two hours since the first shot. Nick is still alive. They are still shooting all around the house. Boys, there is bullets coming in like hail. Them fellows is in such shape I can't get at them. They are shooting from the stable and back of the house. Nick is dead. He died about nine o'clock. I seen a smoke down at the stables. I think they have fired it. I don't think they intend to let me get away this time. They are throwing a rope out of the door and crawling it back. I guess it is to draw me out. I wish that duck would get out further so I could get a shot at him. Boys, I don't know what they have done with them fellows that stayed here last night. Boys, I feel pretty lonesome just now. I wish there was some one here with me so we could watch all sides at once.* They may fool around until I get a good shot before they leave. It is about three now. There was a man in a buck-board and one on horse back just passed. I don't know if they killed them or not. I seen lots of men coming out on horses on the other side of the river and take after them. I shot at the men in the stable just now. Don't know if I got any or not. I must go and look out again. It don't look as if there was much show of me getting away. I seen 12 or 15 men one looks like (here name is scratched out, was scratched out by Wolcott and Tisdale). I don't know whether it is or not. I hope they did not catch them fellows that run over the bridge toward Smith's. They are shooting at the house now. If I had a pair of glasses I believe I would know some of these men. They are coming back. I've got to look out. Well they just got through shelling the house like hail. I heard them splitting wood. I guess they are going to fire the house tonight. I think I will make a break when

night comes if alive. Shooting again. I think they will fire the house this time. It is not night yet. The house is all fired. Good bye boys if I never see you again.

Nathan D. Champion

The above account of the burning of the K. C., together with the murder of Champion and Ray, I give as given me by Solon and others present. I was, as I have said, with the supply wagons and with them I remained until we arrived at the ruins of the K. C.

END OF PART SIXTH